

**Newtown Board of Education**  
**Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Subcommittee**  
**BOE Conference Room**  
**December 9, 2022, 8:00 am**

**3 Primrose Street, Newtown, CT 06470**

**MINUTES**

**Present:** Alison Plante (chair), Deb Zukowski (member), Chris Melillo (superintendent), Anne Uberti (assistant superintendent, remote) and five members of the public.

**Absent:** Dan Cruson (member)

**1. Call to Order**

Ms. Plante called the meeting to order at 8:02 am.

**2. Public Participation**

None.

**3. Approval of minutes from 10/24/22 Meeting**

Ms. Plante moved to approve the minutes from the 10/24/22 meeting. Ms. Zukowski seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

**4. Update on DEI Coordinator search process and contingency plan**

Mr. Melillo said that they interviewed the internal candidates and felt that all lacked the knowledge base for the position. As a backup plan, he then passed out a contract he was working on for Nixon & Co. Consulting Group, an organization that he has had good experience with in the past. The contract, shown in Appendix A, provides the expectations and deliverables needed to build capacity in Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI) that will help Newtown Public Schools (NPS) increase student achievement, engagement, and overall preparation for all Newtown students. Mr. Kellen Nixon will be visiting the district on December 19.

Mr. Nixon was previously introduced to Ms. Uberti and Sandy Hook Principal Dr. Kathy Gombos, via a remote meeting. Ms. Uberti said that both were impressed with the DEAI approach, as presented by Mr. Nixon who has experience working in K-12 schools. Mr. Nixon's work would begin with a needs/equity assessment. Ms. Uberti offered that having someone with an external POV would help ensure an objective assessment. Once the assessment is complete, the next step would be to build internal capacity - i.e., that teachers and staff understand what is needed - to achieve the goals stated above. Mr. Melillo added that Mr. Nixon guided the DEAI curriculum for the Yale Peabody Museum and that he also worked with equity teams at Hamden Public Schools. He collects data through both needs/equity assessment and classroom walkthroughs. He knows how to help others learn how to build capacity using a structured approach. After the meeting ended, all agreed his approach was a good fit for the district.

Mr. Melillo continued that he believed that DEAI work was too broad for one or two people to accomplish. To do well, he said it is “not one person’s responsibility to do for all. It’s everybody’s responsibility.” Ms. Plante supports the work and agrees that getting an outside perspective is a good approach. Ms. Zukowski asked for clarification on what was meant by the language “current priorities” and “self, team, and district” in the contract. Mr. Melillo responded that the priorities are defined by the five tenets as provided in the District’s DEI Statement (see below), that the equity team needed capacity to coach the teachers, and that all teachers need professional development as do the administrators. Ms. Zukowski continued her questions, calling out the focus on “student achievement and engagement” asking “what about culture”? Mr. Melillo responded that students who are immersed in a pedagogy in which they can identify learn more. Such culturally diverse academics leads to broader cultural acceptance which should decrease the need for discipline related to intolerance and increase unity within the school community. Culturally diverse academics can also better prepare Newtown students, who live in a generally homogeneous town, for the diversity that exists beyond Newtown.

Ms. Plante followed by asking if the contract with Nixon & Co. would fit into the budget. Mr. Melillo answered yes. She also asked how present and available company representatives would be. Mr. Melillo responded that members of the company would have a physical presence in the district, supplemented with remote meetings.

In closing, Mr. Melillo mentioned that PEAC members provided feedback that Mr. Johnson, the former DEI Coordinator, was a well-trusted confidant to students and families. Mr. Melillo understands that shared experiences can be key for gaining trust and that sometimes it is just easier to talk with someone who has lived through the same experiences. He is working to figure out how to address this need, in part by focusing on hiring of district staff.

## **5. Debrief on October committee training**

Ms. Zukowski read the following comments provided by Mr. Cruson:

“I thought that the training session was very informative. I appreciated George and Ethel’s breadth of experience and thought that the fact they could tie everything back specifically to education and our role as Board Members was invaluable. I also felt that they created a [safe] environment to have the kinds of conversations that were necessary in this kind of training, and I personally didn’t feel any qualms about bringing up topics I have been unsure about in the past.

I do hope that we can do future sessions with them as it felt like there was further we could learn from George and Ethel. I also continue to feel that inviting the other members of the Board to join these training sessions would be a good idea so they have the opportunity to benefit from it.”

Ms. Zukowski stated that there were parts of the training that she had difficulty “grokking,” i.e., she had difficulty connecting the words with the message. She also expressed concern that the Four Pillars, that she agreed were powerful, were more directed at district operations. That is, the content was more

operational than inspirational, and so was not within the purview of the Board. She also expressed concern about one specific point that seemed to imply that students could take classes in which they were ill prepared to be able to learn. Mr. Melillo replied that the bullet was calling out that, historically, there were times when barriers were used to keep certain students out of high-level classes. Ms. Zukowski noted that she understood and agreed with the concern, but that the language was problematic. She mentioned that the policy committee had begun work on a related policy, and that the issue would be better addressed there.

Ms. Zukowski asked if, instead of Board-specific required training, Board members could have the option of “sitting in” on training given to the equity teams. Mr. Melillo followed by saying that he expects that Mr. Nixon would build trust that may impact future discussions about Board-directed training.

## **6. Update on staff training related to DEI**

Ms. Uberti presented a document, available in Appendix B, that showed all prior DEI training.

## **7. Discussion on committee charge and standing schedule for 2023**

Ms. Zukowski read the following comments provided by Mr. Cruson:

“For the most part I think the charge is good. I think it should continue to call out the Coordinator of DEI because ideally we will have one again in the future, and we do talk about working with the Superintendent as well. I also realized that while we say we will meet Quarterly or as needed it is with the Coordinator of DEI, but that doesn’t define the frequency that the committee will meet. i don’t think we need to make a change, we can continue to meet monthly or as needed as we currently do.

I do think it is worth adding another point to the charge that says that we will work with the other subcommittees to lend a DEI lens to their work as needed. Please feel free to work on the wording, but the idea is that we could be a resource to ensure DEI is considered in other work, for instance Curriculum & Instruction. This is a common practice among the subcommittees, Policy has asked SEL and CFF to look at policies under consideration to lend their input for instance. Since we don’t have a Coordinator I think the committee filling in on some of this at the Board level will be an important addition.”

In addition to the committee charge approved by the Board in December, 2021, Ms. Zukowski referred to the proposed charge that the prior DEI committee’s March 11, 2022 meeting. Ms. Plante and Ms. Zukowski reviewed both versions and also discussed Mr. Cruson’s comment about meeting frequency and his request to explicitly include language that the DEI committee will work with the other committees. Both agreed that meeting frequency need not be in the charge and that coordination amongst committees was implicit among all committees without the need for added language in the charge. In addition, both agreed that the charge should refer to the Equity and Diversity policy that resulted from the resolution rather than the resolution. Finally, both agreed that continuing to meet monthly was an appropriate frequency, and that meeting during the fourth week of the month would help prevent conflicts with meetings of the Board’s other committees. As a follow-up, Ms. Plante will

propose an updated version of the responsibilities language that reflects the edits discussed. [A version of the charge as discussed in the meeting is provided in Appendix C.]

### **8: Finalization of DEI goal statement**

Ms. Zukowski shared a concern that arose during the recent CABE/CAPPS convention. The list of diversity characteristics included in policies, including the Equity and Diversity policy, needs to be reviewed. Diversity characteristics are different depending on the scope of the policy. The Policy Committee is looking further into this concern. Ms. Zukowski suggested that a limited, illustrative set of examples be provided, along with a reference to the full list in the Equity and Diversity policy. That way, the Statement is independent of potential changes in the list of diversity characteristics pertinent to the Equity and Diversity Policy. In addition, Grammar errors were fixed. Ms. Zukowski will prepare language at the next DEI committee meeting for committee approval.

### **9. Public Participation**

None.

### **10. Adjournment**

Ms. Zukowski moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:27 am, seconded by Ms. Plante. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Deborra Zukowski

THESE ARE DRAFT MINUTES AND ARE SUBJECT TO THE APPROVAL OF THE BOE DEI COMMITTEE

## Appendix A

### Project: Newtown Public School District (NPSD) Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI) Initiatives; Current State Assessment; DEAI Work Plan



Nixon & Co. Consulting Group  
Contact Name: Kellen Nixon  
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Newtown Public School District  
Contact Name: Chris Melillo, Superintendent  
Address: 3 Primrose Street Newtown, CT 06470  
E-mail: melilloc@newtown.k12.ct.us  
Phone: 203.426.7600

#### SUMMARY OF SERVICES

Building on the district's current priorities and the recommendations of Newtown Public Schools' Superintendent and leadership team, Nixon & Co. Consulting Group shall act as Project & Lead Facilitator for continued development of NPS' (DEAI) Key Values and Initiatives, specifically focused on increasing student achievement and engagement through exploring Dimensions of Diversity and Identity. The Group will work with Superintendent Chris Melillo and identified members to:

#### Perform a Current State Assessment:

- Timeline: January - April
- Assess current district DEAI happenings
- Assess need through walkthroughs and surveys
- Assess capacity to do the work
  - Where are members of the district with respect to DEAI?
- Outline recommended next steps

#### Create a DEAI Work Plan:

- Timeline: May - Summer '23
- Using the data collected from the Current State Assessment, a plan will be developed that focuses on key district priorities
- Create and Activate the District Equity Team to consist of members of local school Equity teams and members of the Central Office
  - Establish goals for self, team, and district
  - Create messaging and language around what DEAI means within NPS
  - Create structures and Frameworks to support district DEAI efforts
    - Establish common language, disarming and building trust
    - Making space for people to show up as their authentic selves

- Facilitate discussions, and be given the support to develop informed views and opinions around innovative solutions that work for all students.
- Facilitate necessary Professional Learning
  - Creating common language
  - Dimensions of Diversity to support understanding Identity and Belonging
  - Norms for Creating Safe Spaces grounded in the ORID (Objective Reflective, Interpretive, & Decisional) Framework
  - Others to be determined by Current State Assessment
  - Scaling the Work

**1. KEY PERSONNEL**

- 1.1. NPS KEY PERSONNEL: Chris Melillo will be the key contact person for NPS. Melillo will confirm the project timeline/dates and assist Nixon with any supporting documents needed to successfully carry out the proposed initiatives.
- 1.2. NIXON KEY PERSONNEL: Kellen Nixon will be the key contact person for NIXON relating to this Agreement. The direct and personal services of NIXON constitute the essence of this Agreement. NIXON shall perform such services diligently, timely, and conscientiously.

**2. NOT TO EXCEED SCOPE OF SERVICES AND FEES**

The scope and services, as well as payment schedule agreed upon, will not exceed that as outlined without a change order approved by the NPS and executed before the commencement of additional services.

**3. PAYMENT**

**3.1. Fee:**

NIXON will be paid \$48,000 based on the Summary of Services listed above. NIXON's fee is all-inclusive. 25% (\$12,000) of total project costs due 21 days after the contract execution. The 6 additional payments of \$6,000 will be due on a monthly basis with an invoice being submitted on the 1st of each month. NPS will cover all travel, lodging, and other incidental costs associated with the proposed work.

**4. REPRESENTATIONS, WARRANTIES & COVENANTS**

- 4.1. Each Party represents and warrants that: (i) it has all rights necessary to grant the other Party the rights granted by this Agreement; (ii) it has the power and authority to enter into and perform its obligations under this Agreement; and (iii) it is under no obligation, contractual or otherwise, which might in any way interfere with its complete performance of this Agreement.
- 4.2. Each Party agrees that it will comply in all material respects with all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and codes in the performance of the Agreement.

**5. INDEMNIFICATION**

- 5.1. NIXON agrees to indemnify, defend, and hold Company and Licensor, along with their respective affiliates, and its and their officers, directors, members, shareholders, employees, and agents, harmless from and against any losses, damages, liabilities, claims, demands, suits, reasonable attorneys' fees, court costs and expenses that Company or Licensor may incur or be liable for as a result of any claim, suit, or proceeding made or brought against Company or Licensor based upon, arising out of, or in connection with (i) NIXON's breach of any of its representations, warranties or covenants hereunder, or (ii) NIXON's negligence or willful misconduct in connection with the agreed-upon project.
- 5.2. NPS shall indemnify and hold harmless NIXON and all of its personnel from and against



any claims, damages, losses, and expenses (including reasonable attorney's fees) arising out of, or resulting from, the performance of the services, provided that any such claim, damage, loss, or expense is caused in whole or in part by the negligent act, omission, and/or strict liability of the NPS, anyone directly or indirectly employed by the NPS, withstanding NIXON.

**6. LIMITATION OF LIABILITY**

In no event shall a Party be liable to another Party for any loss of profits or other special, indirect, incidental, punitive, consequential, or exemplary damages of any kind in connection with this Agreement or any of the products, services, or activities contemplated hereunder.

**7. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY**

NPS and NIXON understand that all copyrights, patents, trade secrets or other intellectual property rights associated with any ideas, concepts, techniques, inventions, processes, or works of authorship developed or created by NIXON during the course of the NIXON's engagement as an independent contractor performing the services described hereunder ("Work Product") will belong exclusively to NIXON.

**8. CONFIDENTIALITY**

- 8.1. The Parties agree that no press announcement or press release in connection with the Agreement shall be made unless the other Party hereto shall have given its prior written consent to such announcement (including the form thereof), whose consent shall not be unreasonably withheld. If the reviewing Party does not respond to the request of the proposing Party for approval of an announcement within 5 (five) days of receipt of the request, the request is deemed approved.
- 8.2. NPS and NIXON agree, as may be permitted by law, not to divulge or permit or cause their officers, directors, members, stockholders, employees, or agents to divulge the substance of the Agreement except to their respective representatives and attorneys or as may otherwise be required by law in the opinion of counsel for the Party required to make such disclosure. Additionally, during and after the term of the Agreement, neither NPS nor NIXON shall disclose to anyone for any reason, without the prior written consent of the other, any marketing plans, strategies, results, or other confidential information divulged to or learned by either Party about the other from any source whatsoever, unless and until such information has generally become available to the public from sources other than the other Party.

Accepted for NIXON & Co.:  
NIXON & CO. CONSULTING GROUP  
Name: Kellen Nixon  
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Title: Principal  
E-mail: [kellen@nixonandco.com](mailto:kellen@nixonandco.com) Phone: 704.618.3696

Signature:  Date: 11/22/2022

Accepted for Newtown Public School District:  
NPS  
Name: Chris Mellillo  
Address: 3 Primrose Street Newtown, CT 06470  
Title: Superintendent  
E-mail: [melilloc@newtown.k12.ct.us](mailto:melilloc@newtown.k12.ct.us) Phone: 203.426.7600

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Newtown Public Schools Training Related to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to Date As of Dec 9, 2022

<b>Date</b>	<b>Professional Development Topic/Activity</b>	<b>Audience</b>	<b>Presenter</b>
Fall & Spring, 2019	Understanding and Supporting Transitioning Adolescents	Reed Staff	Tony Ferralolo
November, 2020	Dr. Derrick Gay, Keynote Address	District -wide	Dr. Derrick Gay
	“How Do You Become an Antiracist When You Don’t Know How to Talk About Race.”	District-wide	Partners for Educational Leadership (formerly Connecticut Center for School Change)
	Embedding SEL Practices into the Classroom	District/Choice	Staff Led
	Mindfulness	District/Choice	Staff Led
	Growth Mindset	District/Choice	Staff Led
April, 2021	Let’s Talk: Facilitating and Engaging in Challenging Conversations	District-wide	Partners for Educational Leadership (formerly Connecticut Center for School Change)
	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Instructional Core: Guidance from Research and Practice	District-wide	Partners for Educational Leadership (formerly Connecticut Center for School Change)
August, 2021	BOE Resolution & Diversity Self-Reflection,	9-12	Kim Longobucco, NHS Principal
November, 2021	DEI Overview, District Goals, Building Plans	9-12	Kim Longobucco, Principal & Wesley Johnson, DEI Coordinator
April, 2022	DEI: Definitions, Terms, & Resources	9-12	Kim Longobucco, Principal & Wesley Johnson, DEI



	Gender Identity & Pronouns		Coordinator & NHS DEI Committee
May, 2022	Curriculum Development Training (including use of Equitable Practices Rubric)	Select Group of ELA & Social Studies Teachers, Curriculum Developers and Reviewers	EdAdvance
August, 2022	Introduction: What is Diversity, Equity and Inclusion?	K-12 Equity Leaders	Wesley Johnson, DEI Coordinator
September, 2022	Why the 4 Pillars of Affirming Race and Diversity as a Framework	K-12 Equity Leaders	Dr. George Coleman
October, 2022	Micro Behavior (Aggression, Assault, Invalidation, Insult)	K-12 Equity Leaders	Teresa Rangel, Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Naugatuck Public Schools
November, 2022	Instructional Strategies for ELL Newcomers and SLICE (Students with Limited or Interrupted Life Experiences)	9-12	EdAdvance
November, 2022	Conceptualizing DEI Planning & Implementation Using the 4-Pillar Model	9-12	Dr. George Coleman, Esther Bobowick
November, 2022	Understanding Bias	K-12 Equity Leaders	Kevin Walton, Director of Equity and Inclusion, ACES

## Appendix C

### Current committee responsibilities:

#### DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE

1. Meet quarterly (*or as needed*) with the Coordinator of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to support his/her work and make the Board aware of any needs.
2. Work with the Superintendent and Coordinator of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to ensure that actionable items they have developed are addressed while reflecting the Board of Education's mission, beliefs and objectives.
3. Recommend to the Board of Education any action that needs their approval to support the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion needs of staff and students.

### Proposed updated version:

#### DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE

1. Review, support, and oversee the goals and objectives of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion work in the District to ensure consistency with Board policies.
2. Work with the Coordinator of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, and the Equity Team and act as a bridge to the Board of Education and its committees on matters related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.
3. Recommend to the Board of Education any action that needs their approval to support the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion needs of staff and students.

