

Newtown Board of Education Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Subcommittee

**September 9, 2022, 1:00 pm
Council Chambers
3 Primrose Street, Newtown, CT 06470**

MINUTES

Present: Alison Plante (chair), Dan Cruson (member), Deb Zukowski (member), Chris Melillo (Superintendent), Anne Uberti (Assistant Superintendent) and six members of the public.

1. Call to Order

Ms. Plante called the meeting to order at 1:02 pm.

2. Public Participation

Nicole Maddox, 14 Nighthawk Lane, does not believe the item on the agenda is within the scope of the Committee. The DEI Committee is very important and she appreciated the role Wes Johnson played in the district. It is important to again establish trust with the incoming DEI coordinator and for the Board not to define the specifics of the position, as that is the purview of the administration.

Kate McGrady, 26 Philo Curtis Rd, is disappointed that there is not an opportunity for the public to provide comment at the end of the meeting. She prefers to speak then rather than prior to the meeting, to reflect on the meeting discussion. She urges the Committee to rethink its public participation practices.

3. Goals and Objectives for DEI Coordinator

Ms. Plante asked Ms. Uberti to walk the Committee through the draft that was prepared in response to the Board's charge.

Ms. Uberti expressed concern that the level of the goals and objectives for the DEI Coordinator position, being that it is a certified teaching position, may be inconsistent with that of other certified staff. Instead, the person who accepts the position should work with Mr. Melillo and her to develop an overall plan for DEI and measurable objectives. One person cannot carry the entire DEI load for the district. Rather, the work is spread among many in the district. Measurements for success are related to the plan, not the position.

Mr. Melillo added that DEI is not a "siloe" effort. It is infused in everything we do, including evaluation and curriculum. Teacher evaluations are based on Student Learning Objectives (SLOs). SLOs are based on the position. DEI is not tied to one position. For example, Ms. Uberti is not "in charge" of curriculum, though she does oversee it. There are curriculum committees that also play a role in curriculum. DEI is embedded throughout the community, including teachers, administration, school committees, and BOE. The DEI coordinator position supports the overall efforts.

Mr. Cruson mentioned that he had reached out to a CABE attorney about the question of goals and objectives. The response was that the Board should adhere to policy and have caution to ensure that it is not overstepping the teacher contract.

Ms. Plante agreed. There are many existing definitions and goals of DEI in the Board's policy, on the district website, and within the presentations that Mr. Johnson gave the Board. She agrees that we should find the person first, then craft the plan, and then create measurable objectives based on that plan.

Mr. Cruson added that Mr. Johnson had done a lot of ground work that we can leverage.

Mr. Melillo said that it was important to ensure that the process to fill the position is transparent. Transparency builds trust that is needed for us to move forward together to ensure that students get the help they need. We need to put the information out to the community and hear from the public.

Ms. Zukowski, working off a first draft for possible Goals and Objectives provided by Ms. Uberti (see Appendix A), commented that she agreed that that the first paragraph stated a broad description for DEI. She requested three edits: 1) add the words "when used together" after the word "words" to resolve potential ambiguity, 2) add "contributions" to the list "representation and participation," and 3) to ensure that the listed groups match the policy. She then read Tenet #4, that provides a list consistent with the policy. She also recommended including Mr. Melillo's updated Tenets after the first paragraph, as a more "operational definition" for the district. (The updated Tenets are included in Appendix B.) Regarding the rest of the original document presented by Ms. Uberti, she agreed that there are questions of the Board's purview. She suggested that the definition end with the Tenets.

Ms. Uberti said that the district could create a steering committee, that would review and monitor progress.

Mr. Cruson added that the DEI committee would be a liaison for the Board and would report progress.

Ms. Plante agreed and suggested that the DEI Coordinator could come give periodic presentations to the Board, just as the Directors of Finance, Facilities, and Teaching and Learning often do.

Mr. Melillo suggested that the new definition be sent to all members of the Board so they could provide input prior to the next DEI Committee meeting.

Mr. Cruson asked if more should be included, for example that the position would include providing resources to the staff and administration, and asked what role the position would have related to incidents.

Ms. Uberti replied that level of detail is more akin to action steps rather than goals.

Ms. Zukowski suggested reconciling the goals listed in the originally presented document (Appendix A) with the Tenets. The goals are more about the position. The Tenets provide the

guidelines with which to determine the goals. She also suggested that it is time to focus on the education within the classroom, i.e., culturally responsive education.

Mr. Melillo said that the district should focus on building capacity across the schools. We need “knowledgeable others” who can then create “knowledgeable others,” e.g., equity leaders, effective professional development, classroom pedagogy.

Mr. Cruson noted that the DEI Coordinator is not “one person with a cape”, but rather someone who is building out a support system within all the schools.

Ms Uberti noted that there are structures already embedded in the schools, e.g., the Safe Climate Committees, curriculum committees, professional development. It is very much a partnership. This position should also be able to support teachers. Teachers are asking for help related to ensuring that they can expand perspectives within their classrooms. The staff wants this support.

Mr. Melillo likened the effects of DEI with the effects of “curb cutouts.” Curb cutouts first started in response to providing better access to those in wheel chairs. Once they were in place, many others benefited, e.g., mailmen moving packages and those with strollers. DEI initiatives that support diverse students in our classrooms can have benefits for all students.

Ms. Zukowski asked if diverse curriculum and pedagogy would also be included in classrooms that may not happen to have diverse students. Mr. Melillo answered yes.

Ms. Uberti asked if the Committee recommended keeping the Goals as listed in the original document.

Ms. Plante responded that she believes they should not, as they get too close to SLOs which are outside of the Committee’s purview. We should heed Mr. Melillo, Ms. Uberti, and CABE’s guidance on this.

Ms. Plante said that a new document, based on the discussion above, should be created and shared with the Board for input prior to the next DEI committee meeting.

The committee then again reviewed the current input from the other Board members, to ensure that the new document would be consistent with their input. They agreed that much of the input was covered by, or would directly follow from, the tenets. The concern related to bullying would be better addressed in the bullying policy, and the request for outcomes directly related to the position would be detailed in the SLOs, that are part of the teacher evaluation.

4. Adjournment

Mr. Cruson moved to adjourn the meeting at 2:01 pm, seconded by Ms. Zukowski. Passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Deborra Zukowski

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

Appendix A

DEI Position Goals – Draft 9.8.22

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Position Goals

- Reviews and informs practices related to conflict resolution, bullying and harassment prevention, including racial bullying
- Creates a calendar and provides resources of celebrations and monthly recognition events
- Develops strategies to increase the representation of marginalized students, including students with disabilities, in student leadership roles
- Strengthens connections with ELL students and families to our schools, especially "Newcomer" American families
- Collaborates with community and parent organizations

Goal 2: Identify and share resources and information with staff, leaders and community on matters related to diversity, cultural competency, equity and inclusion that improves academic and social emotional outcomes for all.

Action Step Examples

- Analyzes data related to student achievement, including suspensions, attendance, etc. to identify any disparities
- Attends PLCs and department meetings to assist educators in responding to areas of demonstrated need
- Develops and models lessons which address the needs of students demonstrated through on-going data analysis and teacher feedback
- Serves on Curriculum Development Council to assist in the development and revision of new and existing curricula to ensure inclusion and representation of diverse learners
- Reviews existing curriculum materials to ensure representation of diverse perspectives and identities

Goal 3: Expand opportunities for professional learning that supports the delivery of differentiated, culturally responsive instruction that fosters a sense of belonging and empowers students to achieve their full potential.

Action Step Examples

- Collaborates with the Assistant Superintendent to develop and deliver high quality professional development that supports innovative, inclusive and culturally responsive teaching and learning
- Conducts coaching cycles to build the capacity and knowledge of culturally responsive and instructional practices
- Engages in professional development opportunities to remain current on research, resources, and instructional practices

classroom

- Identifies and reviews indicators related to safe school climate (i.e. achievement data, disciplinary rates, survey results, etc.)

Appendix B

Superintendent's Tenets of DEI

1. Schools should be welcoming and supportive spaces for our students.
2. Our curriculum should be infused with materials that include diverse authors, protagonists, heroes, and historical figures.
3. When studying topics in our classroom, our students will learn through multiple lenses and points of view.
4. Schools should embrace kindness and diversity. Any form of harassment or bullying, whether based on race, culture, color, creed or religion, ancestry, national origin, mental and physical ability, age, marital status, physical appearance, family structure, citizenship status, sexual orientation, gender expression or identity, economic status, veteran's status, or other distinguishing personal characteristic, will not be tolerated.
5. As educators, we need to provide all sides to topics and remain apolitical. To encourage critical thinking, we need to develop learning environments that allow students to identify and understand perspectives provided in the material and related discussions, and to draw their own informed conclusions. That's where true learning occurs.