

Newtown Board of Education
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Subcommittee

BOE Conference Room

April 27, 2023, 6:00 pm

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 Jana Briggs (remote). No members of the public.

Call to Order

Ms. Plante called the meeting to order at 6:01 pm.

1. Public Participation

None.

2. Approval of minutes from February 23, 2023 Meeting

Mr. Cruson moved to approve the minutes from the February 23rd meeting. Ms. Zukowski seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

3. Status update on Nixon & Co.'s Current State Assessment

Ms. Briggs spoke about the prior week's District visit. During that visit, the team spoke to each Board member individually to get feedback on initial concepts. The team also visited Newtown Middle School and Newtown High School for student listening sessions. There were about 12 middle school students participating in the listening session and 2 groups of 6-7 students each in the high school sessions. Ms. Briggs said that "this work is about students and therefore should involve students." They will provide student data next week.

The next steps include preparing findings, i.e., what they heard and what they recommend. They will also connect separately with Mr. Melillo, his team, and each Board member to discuss findings. In addition, the team plans on meeting with members of Newtown Allies for Change. After that, Nixon and Co. will prepare a presentation, preview it in the next DEI meeting (which will be rescheduled to June 1 due to member absences), and then present it to the full Board during the June 6 meeting.

4. Introduction to District DEI data

Ms. Plante said that when Nixon and Co. wraps up its work, they will be providing the District with a road map to guide our diversity, equity and inclusion efforts going forward. To understand if the

approach is working as planned, we need a base line including demographic and academic data. We then can follow trends in that data to better understand the impacts of our work over time.

Ms. Uberti said there is a lot of District data available via the State, and that the State is able to automatically pull data from the District's PowerSchool system. Much, but not necessarily all, of what is pulled becomes available on the State's public Edsight system [edsight.ct.gov]. She first showed Edsight data about about Educator/Student diversity in Newtown over time. (She will share a document containing all links reviewed in the meeting with the committee, see Appendix A.) She noted that some data will be represented by an asterisk instead of a number. Mr. Melillo added that, since the overall numbers may be small enough to identify individual students, the State uses this to ensure FERPA compliance.

Ms. Uberti continued by showing demographic data for what the State refers to as "high needs" students (i.e., English language learners, SPED, and economically disadvantaged). Mr. Cruson asked if differences in data collection might impact the results. Ms. Uberti responded that the measures used have been stable since 2013-2014. She thinks that the information and trends are actual. She continued talking to the data shown on the site, calling out trends including the notable increase in English Language Learners in the last several years. In addition the overall proficiency is lower now than it had been 10 years ago. She added that over the last decade or so, the number of SPED students in our district has doubled, even as our overall enrollment has declined. A discussion about SPED identification ensued. The Committee then reviewed economic data, noting that there was an apparent - and sustained - jump in the number of students receiving free and reduced lunch between 2017-18 and 2018-19.

Ms. Uberti then showed some of the academic data for race and high needs students. This data shows notable differences in overall achievement based on race and high needs. Ms. Zukowski asked if the data can be used to isolate the overall causes or if there might be multiple factors included that make it difficult to do so. Ms. Uberti said that there may be some overlap in factors that might need other data to tease apart. Ms. Plante asked what Ms. Uberti and Mr. Melillo made of the aggregated SPED data, given that every SPED case is different. Ms. Uberti answered that it was hard to draw direct conclusions from aggregated data because of SPED academic performance is very individually based. Instead, she said that the key is individual growth.

Ms. Uberti then shifted to discipline data. She commented that PowerSchool manages such data. She also differentiated between reports and outcomes. This year, there has been a big change in incident management. The District has increased overall transparency, improved communication, and worked to ensure uniformity of incident management across schools. Mr. Cruson mentioned that parents may underestimate the use of trusted adults vs. that of the Anonymous Alert App. Ms. Uberti agreed that reports received via the app represent a small percentage of overall incidents. Ms. Zukowski asked about attendance and if that might indicate that a student does not feel welcomed. Ms. Uberti responded that the District remediates discipline and attendance at the individual level.

Ms. Zukowski suggested that the Committee needs to focus on which data best informs the Board about overall progress regarding DEI efforts and diverse students. Ms. Plante added that we should

approach this as an iterative effort, starting with some data and indicators that we believe will be useful, and adding to them over time. It was also suggested that we could start with one component (e.g., academic achievement), develop a quality set of data and metrics for that, and then extend to other areas over time. Mr. Cruson added that it would be good to have something that could show impact trends. Ms. Uberti said the District has a Safe School Survey, but it doesn't break out the data by diversity. Ms. Zukowski added that there are other areas we might want to follow, including representation of race and other high-needs students in SPED programs and equitable access to challenging classes and programs (e.g., AP courses and Gifted and Talented). All concurred that the road map and recommendations for tracking progress from Nixon and Co., in conjunction with identifying the key data and metrics to track over time, would be very useful.

5. Structure for oversight of District DEI efforts

Ms. Zukowski moved to postpone agenda item 5 to a later DEI meeting. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

6. Public Participation

None.

7. Adjournment

Mr. Cruson moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:16 pm, seconded by Ms. Zukowski. Motion passed unanimously.

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

Appendix A

DEI Data Review 4.27.23

[Educator Diversity](#)

[Newtown High Needs Students](#)

[Smarter Balanced Performance - High Needs](#)