

BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE EQUITY SUBCOMMITTEE MINUTES

REMOTE MEETING

OCTOBER 30, 2020

Present: Ms. Evelyn Gomez, Proposed Chair
Ms. Tara Donner, Proposed Secretary
Ms. Amy Checkoway
Mr. John Phelan, Superintendent

Also in attendance Tim Flood, Special Education Parent Advisory Council
Joe Bernard

Agenda

Introduction

Since this is the first meeting of this new subcommittee, participants talked about the need for establishing a leadership structure (chair and secretary), discussing the vision and role of this subcommittee, and making sure the subcommittee follows the established norms of the other subcommittees of the School Committee in terms of collaboration with the school department.

- Member Gomez shared the previously developed charge for the subcommittee: "Monitor and evaluate the extent to which the Belmont Public Schools are ensuring equity for all students, staff, and community members. Recommend changes in policy and procedures to the School Committee and charge the Superintendent with strategically building upon the ongoing equity work underway in the district to further equity for all students."

The next meeting will include those topics on the agenda for further discussion and action. In the meantime, Evelyn Gomez has volunteered as a potential chair for the committee and Tara Donner has volunteered to serve as a potential secretary for the committee. Formal appointments will be voted on at the next meeting.

Equity Audit/Assessment Process Discussion

Evelyn Gomez introduced the topic of the potential equity assessment that has been previously discussed for the district, in particular what needs to happen so that this work begins.

Superintendent John Phelan responded that he would like:

- some kind of request for proposals to be established,
- the school department to speak with other districts who have done similar equity assessments to learn from their experiences with the process, and
- To consult with Kalise Wornum, with whom the BPS has an existing relationship, about proceeding with the desired equity assessment

Member Gomez mentioned that she is aware that the Teaching Systems Lab at MIT does equity audits that focus on racial justice, but that we may want to seek out a broader type of assessment that encompasses areas not limited to racial justice.

Potential Issues or Goals for the Subcommittee to Examine

Member Donner raised a procedural question about whether we should be establishing the broader goals that the subcommittee will work on before we discuss further specific action items. It was agreed that the equity subcommittee needs to prioritize goal setting as described in the introduction to the meeting. Potential topics to consider at a future meeting when goals and action items are officially established that were brought up by meeting attendees today include:

- Which subgroups of the BPS community already have formal groups to speak for their interests or accountability mechanisms in place vs. which subgroups do not
 - For example, ELE department chair Lindsey Rinder brought up a concern she has heard from teachers that LGBTQ students are not formally identified and there is no data to establish how this group of students are being served in our system
 - Superintendent Phelan gave the example that our Black and brown families do not have a formal group or established oversight to elevate their voices
- How can the BPS take steps back from the established processes of the system on a granular level to assess how established routines may be contributing to structural inequality in the overall school system?
 - For example, how do we decide on fees and waivers for various programs? Are the availability of waivers consistent across programs?
 - Is the attendance policy contributing to inequality? The system of leveling classes?
- Can we establish both short and long term goals?
 - We should use the equity assessment process to inform this decision making.
 - Tim Flood, director of Belmont SEPAC, asked whether a potential equity auditor would have access to private records which may be related to establishing deficits in equity for particular groups of students.
- Community member Joe Bernard expressed concern that the equity director position be prioritized in this year's budget

Report out from BECA Meeting

Member Donner reported out from the most recent meeting of the Belmont Educators of Color and Allies (BECA) community meeting that happened earlier this week on October 26.

- Kathryn Bonfiglio of Belmont Against Racism (BAR) had expressed concern that the Boston based METCO families did not receive the full amount of meeting time at this past School Committee meeting as is traditional of the SC in other years at the second SC meeting in October
 - Possible solutions were discussed:
 - John Phelan reported that Janice Darias, assistant superintendent, and Rosa Innis, Belmont METCO director have already scheduled more meeting time to meet with our Boston families. Rosa also does monthly meetings with our Boston families.
 - Could the SC dedicate particular office hours to METCO families?
 - Or, could we designate one equity subcommittee member to attend the monthly meetings between Rosa and Boston families?
 - We should check with Rosa to see if Boston families want more meeting time with the SC, in which case we can schedule another SC meeting focused on METCO; or if they would prefer another solution (like an SC member attending monthly meetings with Rosa and parents).
 - We could seek out a representative of METCO families to attend the equity subcommittee meetings (idea from Tim Flood)
- Denisa LaPolla, Chenery teacher, expressed interest in having the equity subcommittee invite the BPS affinity group for teachers and staff of color (which has around 40 members) to one of our meetings to discuss potential topics like:
 - How do we retain teachers and staff of color?
 - Could we conduct exit interviews for teachers and staff of color who have recently left the district?
- How are we collecting data about the experiences of students of color? Is it on a consistent basis, rather than a one time event?
- Could Kimberly Thomas be invited back to work more with staff and the community as a whole?
- How can we get feedback from a wider variety of families who may not respond to surveys? Could some form of texting/SMS be used to support this effort for families who opt in?
 - John Phelan mentioned that the school department is currently developing a new survey method which utilizes the student information database in the district in order to track which families do and do not respond to surveys.
 - Lindsey Rinder expressed interest in participating in this discussion because it is an issue that is a challenge for the families she serves as ELE director

Meeting adjourned at 12:32pm

Respectfully submitted by Tara Donner

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tara Donner", written over a horizontal line.