

**BELMONT EQUITY SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES  
REMOTE MEETING  
AUGUST 9, 2021**

**RECEIVED  
TOWN CLERK  
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: October 22, 2021  
TIME: 9:10 AM

Present: Mr. Jamal Carlos Saeh, Subcommittee Chair  
Ms. Amy Checkoway, Subcommittee Member  
Mr. Michael Crowley, Subcommittee Member  
Ms. Meghan Moriarty, School Committee  
Ms. Janice Darias, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction

The meeting was called to order at 4:30 pm.

**1. Update /Introduction of the DEI Director hire**

Ms. Darias provided an overview of the DEI director hiring process. There were 31 applicants, and a screening committee determined the semi-finalists. Four semi-finalists were interviewed in late June, and Ms. Chon'tel Washington was identified as the top choice. She accepted and her contract has been executed. Her first day will be on September 1. The subcommittee expressed excitement about this.

A community member inquired about the diversity of the search committee, and Ms. Darias explained the different groups that were represented on the committee.

There was discussion about the importance of not overwhelming the DEI director right away with lots of meetings, and a suggestion was made to educate the community further about what a DEI director does and what an equity audit is. A suggestion was made to write an article to the paper about the DEI director responsibilities. The subcommittee decided that the school department central office should take the lead on an article since it is informational in nature.

One community member commented that it sounded to her like the specific priorities aren't clear yet for the DEI director, and that therefore there is a risk that if the work is not rolled out in the right way, support for the position could be eroded.

**2. Update on the equity audit and next steps**

The first phase of the audit is focused on special education and the disproportionate categorization of black and brown students in Belmont with special needs.

A question was asked about what type of community input there would be as part of the larger equity audit. It was discussed that there would be meetings and community forums. The suggestion was also made that a trained facilitator help with community conversations. There was also a suggestion that the DEI director meet with different community groups, and that other community members could be invited to join these meetings.

### **3. Summer reading list**

Mr. Saeh opened the discussion with the concepts of the pedagogical appropriateness of the list, if the content of the books and/or concept of the list simply make some people feel uncomfortable, and/or if the list is “racist” (as some have suggested).

Ms. Darias provided an overview of the process for selecting the list and referred everyone to slide 12 in the Superintendent’s recent report to the School Committee for a summary of the process. This is a suggested list that families can choose from; these books are not required.

Some emails were received from community members happy with the list, and some emails were from people (both in and outside of Belmont) who did not like the list or approve of some of the books that were included.

The discussion, which included comments from a handful of community members attending the meeting, covered the following topics: 1) uncertainty about how best to have discussions about race and how to involve a wide audience, including those who feel uncomfortable; 2) the urgency that some families feel to talk more about race in Belmont; 3) specific concerns about the book *Not My Idea*, including the question about a white devil at the end of the book; and 4) the value of having uncomfortable conversations and importance of the list.

### **4. Brainstorm: Goals for the subcommittee/BPS on equity & communication with the Town Diversity Task Force**

There was discussion about what metrics could be used to measure progress, such as information about how many educators have taken an anti-racist teaching elective course, tracking the use of professional development time on CRT, and student climate surveys that are already administered (VOCAL) in four different grades. Other data might include MCAS, grades, and behavioral changes.

Ms. Kim Haley-Jackson from the town’s Diversity Task Force provided an update that they will be making recommendations to the Select Board, and their first focus has been on education. They were supposed to submit recommendations in October, and will be asking for an extension until December. There was discussion of a potential joint meeting with the Diversity Task Force to discuss goals and priorities.

**The meeting adjourned at 6:30 pm on a unanimous motion offered by Mr. Saeh and seconded by Mr. Crowley (4-0).**

Respectfully Submitted by:

  
Amy Checkoway