

Board of Education
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Subcommittee

Minutes of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Subcommittee meeting held on April 3, 2024 in the Board of Education conference room, 3 Primrose Street.

C. Gilson, Chair
D. Ramsey
D. Linnetz

C. Melillo, Superintendent
A. Uberti, Assistant Superintendent
K. Nixon
J. Briggs
1 Public

Mr. Gilson called the meeting to order at 6:03 pm.

MOTION: Ms. Linnetz moved to add discussion regarding the Allies in Education Award.

Mr. Ramsey seconded. Unanimously approved.

Item 1 - Public Participation

Item 2 - Superintendent's Overview and Update

Mr. Melillo reported that Mr. Nixon and Ms. Briggs visited Newtown last month to work with the equity leaders and administration on communicating with families. They will be back in Newtown tomorrow to conduct a fishbowl activity where the group will be having discussions in small groups. Mr. Melillo also reported that he is working with the equity leaders to have a more leadership role. He stated that he would like to plan a forum for families towards the end of this school year.

Mr. Melillo said that his newsletter has been well received and he received a lot of positive feedback.

Mr. Gilson asked if the board members were allowed to attend the training.

Mr. Melillo said that they were welcome to join.

Item 3 - Update on Progress Towards DEI Workplan

Mr. Nixon and Ms. Briggs reported on their progress towards the DEI workplan. Mr. Nixon stated that from their perspective, they witnessed the leadership in the room come out of their shell in the last session. They were able to navigate through conflict resolution. The scenarios that were played out were very well received. Ms. Briggs seconded Mr. Nixon's statements. She added that she really enjoyed the last session and found the conversations around everyone's conflict management style very interesting. There were many conversations regarding strategies that she felt were very important because every conflict is different. The conversation is very different if you are having a conflict with a parent versus a student.

Mr. Gilson asked how many teachers and administrators attended.

Mrs. Uberti said it is important for the whole team to attend these sessions so there are four teachers/administrators from each school.

Mr. Gilson asked if teachers feel like the administrators have their back.
Mrs. Uberti said that they do. She stated that each session has been more powerful than the last and she is excited for the next one tomorrow. She added that during their last session, they discussed having the teacher act as a facilitator without having their own opinion and Mrs. Uberti thought that was extremely important when having difficult conversations with students. Ms. Briggs agreed and it helps people to become critical thinkers.
Mr. Nixon and Ms. Briggs both agreed that the progression of the conversation through each session has been incredible to witness.

Mr. Gison asked if they felt the teachers were pushed to get out of their comfort zone.
Mrs. Uberti believes that the last session with the role playing activity was a turning point for most attendees and was powerful.
Mr. Melillo added that he believes that the team started to trust each other and the process. People were more guarded in the beginning but now they feel safe and are opening up in the workshops. They were able to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Mr. Nixon and Ms. Briggs encouraged them to stop the conversation if they felt they needed more guidance or advice.

Mr. Gilson asked what topic was for tomorrow's session.
Mrs. Uberti said it is a reflective session and they will reflect on what they are doing in their own schools. Mr. Nixon and Ms. Briggs will ask teams to volunteer to participate in a fishbowl type of activity. Mr. Nixon added that the main goal through this work is for the parents to feel engaged and the kids to feel safe.

Mrs. Linnetz really appreciates the experiential nature of the session that they are conducting. She appreciates all of the updates.
Mr. Ramsey also expressed his gratitude for the work that Mr. Nixon and Ms. Briggs is doing for the district.
Mrs. Linnetz asked if we are on track in the work plan.
Mrs. Uberti said that they are. Mr. Nixon said the work plan has been flawless.

Mr. Gilson asked Mr. Melillo and Mrs. Uberti if they felt the work that they are doing is helping

Item 4 - New Business

Approval of February 7, 2024 minutes:

MOTION: Mrs. Linnetz moved to approve the minutes of February 7, 2024. Mr. Ramsey seconded. Motion passes.

Updated Subcommittee Identification to "DEAI, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion Subcommittee":

MOTION: Mrs. Linnetz moved to update subcommittee identification to "DEAI, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion Subcommittee". Mr. Ramsey seconded.

Mr. Gilson stated that he is proposing changing the subcommittee identification to DEAI, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion. It is nationally recognized as DEAI. He also spoke with Mr. Nixon and he agrees with the change.

Mr. Ramsey offered some thinking points on this change. He stated that DEAI has taken a bad rap because of politics. He suggested creating an umbrella term to help prevent conflict. He suggested changing the name to Human Relations Committee with the focus being on DEAI. The end goal is to love one another and show sensitivity.

Mrs. Linnetz can not argue with anything that Mr. Ramsey said but what is most important to her is the quality of the work that is being done. She acknowledged that the name is very politized on a national level. She noted that she does not want the district to shy away from calling the work what it actually is.

Mr. Melillo said that the work that they are doing in the district is very intentional. He believes the name is very important and including accessibility is necessary. Calling the subcommittee a different name would create more confusion and transparency.

Mrs. Uberti agrees to include accessibility as well. It is important to be honest and transparent.

Motion approved.

Discussion regarding the Allies in Education Award:

Mr. Gilson reported that the Board received an email from Ms. Maddox asked if the District would be interested in nominating an employee for their 3rd annual Allies in Education Award. Mrs. Uberti and Mr. Melillo both agreed that they do not nominate employees for outside awards but the Allies could reach out to employees to nominate for their colleagues like the process for Profiles in Professionalism.

Item 5 - Public Participation

Don Lococo, 27 Hi Barlow Road, Newtown, provided a background on what the Allies in Education award was and how they received nominations in the past.

Item 6 - Adjournment

MOTION: Mrs. Linnetz moved to adjourn. Mr. Ramsey seconded.

The meeting adjourned at 7:24 pm.