

**Board of Education
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Subcommittee**

Minutes of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Subcommittee meeting held on February 7, 2024 in the Board of Education conference room, 3 Primrose Street.

C. Gilson, Chair
D. Ramsey (absent)
D. Linnetz

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

Mr. Gilson called the meeting to order at 5:14 p.m.

Item 1 – Public Participation – None

Item 2 – Superintendent’s Overview and Update

Mr. Melillo had no update because he just provided one at last night’s Board meeting.

Item 3 – Update on Progress Toward DEI Workplan

Mr. Nixon said we were here a few days ago and met with Chris and Doria about the work and also spent time with the equity leaders and provided a recap of the last session along with a discussion of the survey and uncertainty around the goals. We had a conversation on how we started the work and appreciated our approach. We also had a conversation on the takeaways of this work. We spoke about what the discomfort was around what to say and the gray area and discovering ways of supporting families and students.

Ms. Briggs said there were two things she came away with which was the conversation around that gray area and reminding the folks in the room that we can leverage the community to support our efforts. The second was when things were presented that posed questions or concerns, we already had answers. We spoke about needing a more diverse staff and the hiring plan. She has confidence they trust us in doing this work. Having Chis and Doria’s support is huge.

Mr. Nixon feels they are ideal for this work. It’s very encouraging to have Board member support and is much appreciated.

Ms. Briggs will reach out to set up a meeting the first week of March for a regular visit. In the next week we will bring you the hiring plan and presentation for the Board.

Mr. Melillo referred to the ELL presentation at the Board meeting and noted that we have 71 students who qualify for ELL services. Our dominant foreign languages are Spanish and then Portuguese. He feels this work is preparing us for the influx of the different cultures coming into Newtown.

Mr. Nixon said this work is preparing for the influx of different cultures coming to Newtown. Immigrants have to look at affordability and the work available as to where they want to live. He also spoke about the political climate.

Ms. Briggs added that you are already doing the work and are in a better position to welcome immigrants to Newtown.

Mr. Melillo said we are into professional learning now. Regarding the session on Monday, it was the first time there was a community of practice and almost a bond was created about the work for Newtown.

Mr. Gilson asked about the equity goals and what ways they fill gaps if a teacher is in a situation.

Mr. Melillo said they were in the work plan which presented at a Board meeting and would share that with him.

Mr Gilson said some of the response was the fear of not knowing what to say and deal with a situation. How do they fill in those gaps?

Mr. Nixon said we want to get folks comfortable knowing what they don't know. We push for cultural humility and being able to navigate in a situation. Regarding the session on Monday, the comment that we need more diversity in Newtown was challenged with the thought around what is diversity. Someone said it was a point of racial identify.

Mr. Melillo said there's a fear around handling race and there was a lot of discussion around the listening, asking questions, and open lines of communication. People have different experiences around possible bias and the race issue. There are also educators who become defensive and withdraw.

Mrs. Linnetz said that equipping people with how to handle situations so they don't withdraw sounds like you are making great progress.

Mr. Nixon feels the equity leaders will get there and the administrators and Board of Education beside them will ensure they can.

Item 4 – Discussion and Status Update of District Plan for Diverse Hiring

Mr. Melillo spoke about the minority plan for diverse hiring. It focuses on three areas, which are recruitment, hiring selection, and retention. We are looking on ways to articulate our vision, our mission, and DEI statements. We are looking at areas to advertise our job postings and are looking to start our hiring season earlier. Mr. Nixon and Ms. Briggs will provide input on the plan.

Item 5 – New Business

Approval of January 10, 2024 minutes.

MOTION: Mrs. Linnetz moved that the Board of Education DEI Subcommittee approve the minutes of January 10, 2024.

Mrs. Linnetz noted two changes for the minutes on page 2. The date for submission of the diversity plan should be March 15. In the last paragraph, the first sentence should read "Ms. Briggs said if teachers aren't supported, then they won't be behind the work."

MOTION: Mrs. Linnetz moved to approve the minutes of January 10, 2024 with the amendments. Motion passes.

Update the Subcommittee identification to "DEAL, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion Subcommittee."

MOTION: Mrs. Linnetz moved that the Board of Education DEI Subcommittee approve the change of the subcommittee title to “DEAI, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion Subcommittee.”

Mrs. Linnetz was not sure if accessibility can refer to disabilities or accommodations.

Mrs. Uberti feels the accessibility piece is beneficial and we have been using it internally with staff because it describes anyone who comes to our schools should feel safe and comfortable and have access to learning.

Mrs. Linnetz doesn't think the policy talks about the implementation of a committee and feels we should table it. It doesn't specifically state that the Board of Education should create a DEI committee.

MOTION: Mrs. Linnetz moved to table this vote. Motion passes.

Mrs. Linnetz moved to adjourn.

The meeting adjourned at 6:27 p.m.