

Equity & Social Justice Committee
Minutes
Wednesday, November 4, 2020 6:45 PM

Harlem High School, Main Commons, One
Huskie Circle, Machesney Park, IL 61115
8605 North Second St
Machesney Park, Illinois 61115

Agenda Minutes

1. Call to Order by Patti Lawrence at 6:45 p.m.

2. Roll call

Patti Lawrence, Chair, Evelyn Meeks, Co-Chair, Jason Blume, Sue Berogan, Jill Berogan, Mike Sterling, Kris Arduino, Julie Morris, Michelle VanWambeke, Elana Schelling-Tufte, Jen Curless, Jeremy Bois, Kaila Matthys, Jenny Cleveland, Andrea Sweet, Brad Sweet

3. Motion to approve Agenda

1st Sweet 2nd Morris – 16 aye

All voted aye.

Motion carried

4. Motion to approve September 30, 2020 Minutes

1st J Brogan 2nd Meeks

All voted aye

Motion carried

5. Comments from the Community

none

6. History of Equity Work in Harlem School District

Jeremy Bois and Dr. Morris presented a slideshow

Mission and Long-Range Plan was board approved on 4-14-09, revised on 6-13-11 and again on 10-24-16

Much of our work are centered our Beliefs which have not changed very much over the years. We did tweak a few after beginning our equity work.

All work is based on Focusing on the Individual Child

Harlem's Journey was reviewed

Dr. Bois presented the Equity Mission Statement and talked about how it looks in our schools.

The Equity work is woven into who we are as a district, educators and community.

The number one success is to build a climate of equity throughout the schools with staff, students and community. We are here to build relationships and this is taken seriously. It is above

valuing all of our students and stakeholders. We have grown so much over the past few years due to our equity work. We are culturally teaching and learning in how we learn and what we do. LGBTQ inclusivity, discipline has been a focus and breaking out how disciplines shows up based on race. We started questioning why black males have more discipline issues. We were writing kids up for insubordination and disruption and when looking further we started to see some implicit bias come into this. In order to know how to include LGBTQ we invited people in and built our policy around what they needed. This was a positive change for the District and finding out other perspectives was a huge factor. Students need to feel safe before they can learn. We need to teach students how to process their own emotions and process through this and every student is different. Students with IEP's have been included much more and we review how we are meeting their need as well. We need to include in general ed classrooms as well. Our consciousness has grown over time and we have worked through difficult things with students, staff and community and I am proud of the work we have done.

We need to be accountable but we have to have data to back up our work, specifically our graduation rate which has gone up for each of our subgroups. From 2016 to 2019 we have made significant improvement.

Achievement gaps with the top group is white students. The other groups are compared to them. Black students are 19 points lower than white students. Compared to the State black students perform 34 % lower as well as with Rockford. In Language Arts are achievement gaps are the lowest. As to math, we have an 18 point gap for black students, 17 points lower for Hispanic students and relative to surrounding districts are gaps are lower.

We are a predominantly white community but we have to do equity work and be equity conscious regardless of how many students there are. In 2006 89% of students were white and in 2020 72%. We are hoping diversity grows. People want their children here because they are feeling we are teaching to all children.

7. What does supporting for equity look like? -Discussion

Kaila Matthys a staff member since 2016. She was hired to teach "gifted learners". She began by pulling small groups of students which evolved into a teaching role and has been a part of the equity work since PEG has been here while I have been here in 2017. She works in all elementary buildings except for Machesney, and sees varying degrees of equity work and evolution and is able to see this. She personally feels the most pressing and beneficial tool is why we are sitting here. She teaches first grade and she interrupted a colleague today about teaching all diverse students. A lot of staff still has a problem with conversation openly. She would like to know how this committee is going to help that. She appreciates knowing the history but we need to move forward faster.

She taught cultural diversity and worked with Cathy Martin on this. She was very glad she got involved and African American History was included in curriculum and she was apprehensive We can't wait to do our equity work. She took a class at Beloit Memorial and their makeup was very different than ours. One of the girls asked what the school looked like. She asked why I was there because our district was primarily white. If that student were in Harlem and reflecting on our work would the student feel welcome and seen in her classroom or what would it be like for that student. She also taught AP US History. Part of the barrier is feeling seen and feel like

you belong in a class that is not overly diverse so she made it a priority to diversify the content she was teaching and make sure her students of color were being seen and heard. That was a push in the right direction and the partnership with EOS. She was disappointed with the decision not to continue this but based on a previous meeting she does not know where it stands. It is important work and I would as how are we challenging the equity work and how will it grow.

Nick Stange, teacher noted that what the Board can do is be the extension to the community and conversations need to occur. When the last election happened a student cried because he was scared how the community would treat him. He has a young black student that wants to do a story son Black Lives Matter but she is concerned if she runs it on HNN Mr. Yarbrough and Dr. Bois might get fired. We are working hard and we are talking and we are getting there. We need people to help us with the community and that is the Board. If that is not going to happen I will not come back to the meetings. The setup tonight is not conducive to anything. I don't know what the prupose of this committee is and he feels like a pawn. Every single day we put ourselves out there and I want to know what the Board is doing and what is their equity work. We eed the Board to go back to the community and have the difficult conversations.

Evelyn Meeks as an African American female noted that all her children went to schools and when they attended it was rascist. Her son had mental issues but now it has truly changed. You need to get African American kids back into the school but the way society has things going on it is hard. All her kids are biracial and they don't have to decide. Society is evil and perpetrates the African American is the villian. If they would understand our history and with the help of caucasian people, ie the Black Panther Organization when Edgar Hoover was so evil and all of these organizations. When African Americans start something it gets dismantled. Once desegregated it made us think the opposite is better. The Willie Lynch laws are impacting us today. You can't stereotype people. Black Lives Matter she gets but some people are afraid of it and people have put things out here and blaming things on that movement. Everytime we try to do something someone tries to dismantle it. Many of our youngsters do not know what their ancestors have done and the school district has come a long way. It was bad many years ago. If her son was given a chance it may have a difference. People hae to come together and help each other. We have to keep moving forward and we do need to do the walk and do the talk.

Elana Schelling-Tufte stated that Harlem has come a long way but we are here now as we want to know how the committee is going to move things forward.

Andrea Sweet noted that she has been doing this work since 1979. All her students have a good relationship with her as an individual. Her concern is how are you also going to support us. Two weeks ago or so a parent called upset with her teaching about indiginous people day. She accused me of lying and I know my principal will back me, but her support is wonderful. What kind of support are we going to have from the Board as there are very critical issues in the curriculum. I want to make sure that I have your support.

Evelyn and Patti noted that they will back her but we can learn and grow from each other and coming together will continue to move forward and we need to go at a faster pace. The set up of the room is 100% janitorial services. We welcome suggestions and teaching history they way it should be taught. We need to be teaching these lessons, interrupting converstions and having

those talks. Attendance is down but we are hoping to keep on the path and tonight we want to learn and listen to each other.

By learning other people's history we will begin to care about the past and think about the future. We need history as it makes you grow and appreciate how far you have come.

Patti noted that the Board is very passionate about equity. You have the support of the Board and kids need to know the history to understand the differences. We want the best learning environment for our students and we want them to know the history.

Kaila asked if someone asks if they should come to this meeting what do I tell them. She still doesn't have a vision as to why she is sitting here.

Mike Sterling noted that what we needed to hear tonight is that you had to go to another teacher and explain why they should be doing the right thing and your other colleagues are probably doing this also. We have these meetings to hear your concerns as you are on the ground floor. We need your input and what is going on in the buildings. We will have your back as long as it is not illegal and is in the curriculum. We want to do as much as we can on a daily basis. We don't have the answers we are trying to get answers from staff and administration.

Patti noted that why shouldn't you be in this chair. Everyone should be in these chairs. We want to work together with you to make sure we keep on the path you are on. If you are not in the chair there is no guarantee that we can continue on this path.

Sue Berogan asked if there is a difference in the student as opposed to 2016. The more kids and teachers we can reach is great. We may have some angry parents but there will be parents that will open their eyes. Kids have a lot to say about the election.

Students want to have someone that looks like them teaching African American history. Representation matters. We need to shift in our teacher population as well as student population. How do we get diverse educators in our district.

Dr. Morris noted that one of the things early on was to bring people into our district. We were not ready to welcome them as adults and teachers. There are some things that we learn as we move forward. Finding and working to bring people from different ethnicities need to come to the District. We have challenges in getting diverse staff. People of color have a tough time with community and we really need to focus on bringing the communities together and into this conversation.

Brad Sweet noted he teachers leadership and we have had conversation in class and he asked students what was going on. A very aggressive black female just said that Black Hispanic students could not concentrate. We had a good conversation, He noted that we all need to stop being bystanders and upstanders. When Nick talked about the young lady and there is an aversion to do something is wrong. Black Lives Matter is important and the lady should be championed to do it the right way. His experience in diversity is from the e team my wife has served on.

I don't want to be a bystander and we need to send a message to our community where we are on this journey. Northern Illinois did something by painting Black Lives Matter down their road and Harlem needs to do that by painting orange paint down the bus lane. We need the community to see what is important and this is who we are. If we can't say this it cheapens your

work. We need to tell this lady to go do that and welcome diversity. We need to put a rainbow flag up next to the paint.

Patti asked how do we do this and the police effort. Kaila said we don't talk about defunding and just talk about the definition of Black Lives Matter as they are two totally separate issues.

Patti noted that when she went to the BLM page why is the defund police on there. The people asking to defund the police are asking to use that extra money to go to different agencies.

So much is fake in the news. Things are twisted and they are talking about defunding or reallocating the funds.

A S noted that a staff member said something and she is a person of color all she said is we just want to matter and that is all they want. Elana noted if we can get this out to the community. We need to control the message and what that means to us and our students. This is a perfect way to get kids interested in educator paths. Our kids need to feel that they can come back.

Rockford just started equity work as a reflection on what is happening in their neighborhood and what is happening here. It feels like we have taken a step back from the last meeting. We are doing it everyday and we want the next step, where does this go. We are having conversations with our kids. We need to know that we can go with them.

Patti noted that both Evelyn and her are co-chairs of this committee. We did not want anyone to think that the work doesn't matter. Bring forth suggestions, what is the message going to be, that is why we are here. This is an icebreaker tonight and let's start to challenge each other on how we are going to take that next step.

Jill noted that we were not here before we want to know what we can do to support you. We need to have these conversations. We want to make sure not only are we backing you because you are on the front lines. She noted her daughter deals with mental health issues and she was nervous as she grew up on the west side of Rockford. Her daughter has grown up in the Harlem District. I didn't want her to be what was expected. She signed up for the African American History and did not get it. She will probably take a swipe at a kid that is racist, but her openness and being able to see so much is wrong is why we all need to be here and grow. If we don't know we can support you and we can't grow when we continue to be separated.

Evelyn noted her husband is Thomas Meeks and he works for Winnebago County downtown working with felons and helping people get back. He started as a volunteer and is now hired on. He can talk about so much with race and possibly you would like listening to him. Would that be okay with everyone. He is loved in the community.

Evelyn thanked all for coming and hopes that the others will come back to the next meeting.

Patti noted that the girl should bring the video to this committee and we would love to have that.

EOS will be on the agenda for approval.

Patti noted that we welcome any ideas if someone wants to include on Agenda. We need to determine our next step. Brad noted that we should partner with the Multi-Cultural group of students and start with the plan to paint the path and involve our kids. We want an action plan on what we will do next, are we planning how and who will do it. We can document it and put it out on the Harlem Vet Page and create some momentum of the change and the African

American History class can play a role. It will need a lot of publicity. Patti noted that one of the messages is that Harlem has always been a leader and innovative. Patti noted that we would love to sit down and have a meeting and have this conversation. We need to set a date. Dr. Morris noted it could be the next meeting. Jerry Harris with the Multi-Cultural Student Union should be directly involved. Kaila noted that elementary students want to wear their BLM to school.

Julie noted that we will need to work with HNN and the Multi-Cultural Students, Tommy and have our students work with Mr. Harris, HNN and the girl writing the article, and bring the plan to the next meeting in December. In the mural is could be orange paint with black handprints of elementary kids.

Patti noted that we did a lot of work on the discipline committee as well and we need to keep this on our radar. This committee has been folded into another committee and that is work we can look at here also. She agrees the last meeting was a step back and we want everybody to be on same page and bring all the equity work together. We want to have hard conversations and what we can do better and how we can get there.

Evelyn noted that it touches her heart when she sees different people of different races that want to help her.

Patti noted that right now is the better time to paint and not in December. We need a couple of people from the Board meet with Jerry Harris and talk about the message. The kids can be at the table but the work that we need to do is to set the framework. The kids could write a proposal.

Julie noted that Kyra, Nick, Jeremy and Jerry meet and talk about how students can be brought into the conversation. Board members can meet as well and we can reconvene as a group and say here is our plan and we are moving forward with it. At the December meeting we can invite Tommy and students for multiple perspectives.

Board members will work with Jeremy and we will meet on November 18 at 6:00 p.m.

Students, parents and staff are welcome to come. The meeting will be sent in a circle.

Motion to Adjourn

1st Schelling-Tufte 2d Morris

All voted aye

Motion carried

The meeting adjourned at 8:39 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Kris Arduino,

Recording Secretary