

Chair Update January 2022

Regional School Board Equity Team met on January 11, 2022. Each MESD school district was represented at the meeting by either a superintendent or a board member. The team will meet bi-monthly going forward. With team turnover due to board elections, a big part of our work this year is to orient new members to our existing goals and objectives. Our facilitator for this meeting was **Dr. Johnny Lake**: <https://www.drjohnnylake.org/>, who led us in establishing some common vocabulary, assessing our racial equity work to-date, and committing to next steps. **Our next team meeting will be on March 8.**

I attended the **OSBA Board Chair Cafe** on January 12, 2022. We discussed how to handle public comment and criticism. As we've seen in the news, public comment is handled differently across districts...some only support in-person testimony and have to interrupt patrons if they violate board policy by mentioning names of personnel or talking beyond their allotted time.

Scott Cooper, Chair of Crook County School Board, shared an inspiring story about how they handled challenging public comment in his district. Faced with a lot of angry patrons who ranted and threatened them in their board meetings, the board decided to establish a new practice of scheduling student presentations and staff recognitions at every meeting. For the first hour of every meeting, they celebrate students and staff, filling the board room with a lot of positive energy. By the time they get to public comment, Scott said, most of the air of negativity has gone out of the room. Folks who are there to criticize have kept their comments shorter and more respectful as a result. We celebrated this success together in the Board Chair Cafe.

I attended a **Multnomah County Schools Legislative Summit** coordinated by our MESD lobbyist Stacey Michaelson on January 13, 2022. We were joined by a number of state senators and representatives, and put into three breakout sessions of 20 minutes each to share our concerns regarding mental health needs in our schools.

Our Supt. Lopes Serrao spoke clearly about the need for **equity in the State School Fund formula**, noting the disproportionate impact of COVID on communities of color and English language learners. I shared about the **importance of our community partners** (like Elevate) in providing culturally responsive mental health support. Parkrose was joined by Reynolds (who lifted up student behavioral concerns & staff bargaining challenges) and Centennial (who advocated for community-wide solutions) in our sessions.

We framed the discussion with our gratitude for SSA funding, then provided many details to illustrate a strong, clear picture of the **mental health crises facing our students, staff and families today**. The legislators were shocked to learn about the heavy impact of contact tracing requirements on our school staff (they assumed the public health department was handling that for us!). Michael and I shared our first-hand experiences of hearing from high school students about the importance of school to their mental health. We discussed the pandemic's impact on families' economic health, students' need to work, and more. All legislators expressed concern; some committed to follow up with us for more information.