

BELMONT EQUITY SUBCOMMITTEE JOINT MEETING WITH BELMONT SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
REMOTE MEETING
October 19, 2021

RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA

DATE: December 13, 2021
TIME: 9:09 AM

Present: Mr. Jamal Carlos Saeh, Subcommittee Chair
Ms. Amy Checkoway, Subcommittee Member
Mr. Michael Crowley, Subcommittee Member
Ms. Meghan Moriarty, School Committee Member
Ms. Catherine Bowen, School Committee Member (phone only)
Mr. Michael McAllister, Director of Human Capital
Ms. Chon'tel Washington, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The meeting was called to order at 12:03 pm.

1. Equity Audit Update

Mr. McAllister provided the first part of the update. Information about the equity audit was sent out to families recently. A survey for grades 6-12 will open for six weeks and be administered in class (with an opt-out option). Student focus groups will start next week as well, and an invitation and permission slip will be sent home.

Ms. Washington joined the meeting and added that some focus groups are open to all students and some target non-white students. There will also be focus groups for families.

Mr. Saeh asked if the audit as a whole focuses on the LGBTQ+ population. Ms. Washington responded that in focus groups, participants can bring up any topics they wish. The overarching view is to focus on students of color and families of colors and concerns there. Ms. McAllister added that there are different dedicated spaces for some other groups such as special education families and supports for LBTBQ+ students in schools, and fewer spaces for black and brown students.

A community member (Jason Ketola) commented that his view is that "people of color" encompasses more than just black and brown students. Is there a distinction? Mr. McAllister clarified that the focus groups are an open call to all families including all families of color. Ms. Washington added that discussions so far have focused quite a bit on black and brown families, as data show concerns in this area. Mr. McAllister and Ms. Washington will follow up with each other about how to reach out to additional families for focus groups. Mr. Ketola commented that he knows that some parents of Asian student feel underserved. Ms. Washington clarified that focus groups that the groups that target families of color are for anyone who identifies this way. Mr. Saeh requested that outreach to families be intentional versus passive. Ms. Washington mentioned the PTO diversity subgroups as another connection point.

2. District Equity Goals

Mr. Saeh noted that this agenda item is a big topic and not something that will be resolved today. There are district goals, superintendent evaluation goals, and building goals, and the audit will help identify areas that future goals can focus on. Mr. Crowley commented that based on what is already known, there are some disparities, and we have some sense of lopsided outcomes through DESE data and acknowledgement that there are challenges with hiring diverse staff.

Mr. McAllister noted that goal setting is a step-wise process, and in terms of hiring, we have a long way to go. The district will not know what the eventual goals should be until we see the audit results. Hiring the DEI director, onboarding her, and conducting the audit are all short-term goals. If these are done well, it can set us up for success.

Ms. Moriarty noted that a larger goal is to create an inclusive culture and eliminate barriers to learning, so we need to set things up and put them in place for that to happen. Mr. Crowley added that he feels some impatience and from his perspective, there is room for marginal improvement this year.

Mr. McAllister added that the district has been focused on diverse hiring for a while, and they know there are some issues there, so hopefully the audit will help identify additional strategies. There has been some success, and one question is how to quantify it. Setting a goal of 8% or 12% will not necessarily solve the structural issues.

Mr. Saeh noted that perhaps a three-year strategy or action plan is the main goal for this year. There seems to be agreement that there needs to be a focus on diverse hiring, but we can define this as we go. Could we have a report every quarter about how many new staff are hired and their demographics? Mr. McAllister said that Ms. Washington just received data about staff demographics, so we have these data.

Mr. Crowley also raised putting a spotlight on discipline practices and outcomes. Ms. Bowen noted that she does not recall a lot of disciplinary issues and wonders if we should consider more positive indicators versus just negative ones (e.g., participation in AP courses). Mr. Crowley commented that the disciplinary data (DESE and ED) are small, but real and lopsided.

Ms. Moriarty commented that she is trying to understand the process. She hears questions based on baseline data – are we asking district to come back with practices and efforts and also proposing a timeline for looking at data again?

Mr. Saeh replied that this may be where we end up. He is hearing two areas to put a spotlight on: hiring and discipline. This has already been a focus, and now we can also monitor it quarterly, which elevates the importance of the issues. This is a long-term problem that we will not solve in the next year, but a first step is to put a spotlight on the data. Ms. Moriarty responded that it is important to not just put the numbers in front of the public, but also explain what steps the district is taking and provide context to turn this approach into an asset-based versus deficit-based one.

Ms. Washington acknowledged the interest of the equity subcommittee in hiring and discipline, which is something that can be focused on, although she is hesitant to talk about broader equity

goals before the equity audit is complete because she does not want to confuse the people who will need to carry out the goals – the district and building leaders and educators. She wants their voices to be heard so they will want to adopt any goals. There is a lot to think about, including accountability measure put in place if goals cannot be met.

The equity subcommittee discussed a three-year action plan as a result of the audit findings as soon as February 2022. Mr. Saeh noted that the goal of monitoring hiring and disciplinary data as part of these meetings is not to set a number to reach, but as part of a bigger conversation that will be set by the three-year plan. Curricular plans can also be reviewed again in February.

There was agreement that discussing findings about students of color in the special education system should not wait until February and will be presented at an upcoming School Committee meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 1:00 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Amy Checkoway". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name "Amy Checkoway".