

BE THE HEALING COMMUNITY FORUM
Meeting Notes
Thursday, December 13, 2018, 6:30 p.m.

ATTENDANCE:

An official headcount was taken by Malia Sifling, one of four student scribes for the evening, at 61 individuals in attendance at the first Be the Healing Community Forum.

1. COMMENT SHARED:

Significant conversation began following introductions of the evening with Urban-Suburban (U-S) students' issues. At the center of discussion were U-S students assigned to AIS due to standardized test scores. Students who are persons of color and live in Brighton apparently do better in standardized testing, not U-S students. Some are demoralized by being sent to AIS. The question begs, why not be assigned to extended studies? U-S parents worry of consequences of advocating for child. According to parents, AIS did not benefit students. Should students opt out of tests to avoid AIS? What are the rules for AIS? There is a stigma attached to U-S students. U-S students must ride city bus, not school transportation which singles U-S students out right away. There is separation of students because they are part of U-S. There appears to be little transition or support from urban schools to suburban schools—cultural shock. The administration doesn't acknowledge institutional racism.

Possible Solutions/Action Steps Suggested for Consideration:

Tailor AIS to each child instead? Invite U-S parents to be involved. Have counselor call parents instead of sending letter about AIS. Teacher advocacy. Need for parent liaison. Remove stigma of being U-S student/parent. Provide busing to U-S students. Assess students' needs. What are needs of U-S students similar to Brighton students, service those needs together. Avoid having U-S students taking group pictures to promote U-S program. Can we increase the number of U-S students in Brighton Schools? Is there a support group for U-S students? Understand that U-S students will come from different backgrounds. Can we survey U-S/diverse students to have them share their experiences? Start school later to help U-S busing? Develop staff/faculty training on diversity and equity initiatives and professional development opportunities for BCSD workforce.

Current Practice:

BCSD uses standard criteria to determine eligibility for academic intervention services (AIS). A team of educators at each school periodically review students' achievement in several areas. These areas include scores on state tests, MAP test scores, classroom performance and teacher observations. Students are recommended for AIS services based on the stated criteria. Parents are given written notification that their child has been determined eligible for AIS.

Upon entrance into BCSD all families meet with counselor and the range of services, eligibility for the services and the processes that are followed will be more thoroughly

explained so that no family feels blindsided by what the school recommends. In addition, it would be helpful if new families received a personal phone call to ask if the family has any questions or concerns about a recommended placement or service.

2. COMMENT SHARED:

Examine curriculum and discover whose voice is missing. Are all people represented? Why are we not teaching institutional racism at younger grades?

Possible Solutions/Action Steps Suggested for Consideration:

Examine materials to ensure that contents are culturally inclusive. Conversation about white privilege, class privilege, socioeconomic privilege. Do more outside the common core curriculum. Teachers need a forum where they feel comfortable and can share their experiences in a safe environment and space.

Current Practice:

Last year, Brighton's Curriculum Council, made up of teachers, administrators, parents and students spent the year studying the topic of "culturally responsive practices" and what those might look like in an educational setting. The group read a number of research and mainstream articles written by leading authors in the field, invited in guest speakers, including a panel of diverse student leaders, and attended professional learning seminars on the topic. This year, a subset of the Council is creating guidance, which will eventually be used by the entire K-12 staff, for developing and updating our curriculum so that it's more culturally responsive and inclusive as well as updating our current textbook and resource adoption regulation to include an analysis of culturally relevant elements.

3. COMMENT SHARED:

What can we do as adults to support students?

Possible Solutions/Action Steps Suggested for Consideration:

What school resources, if any, can support parent growth in having these conversations? Train staff and parents on how to talk about these issues. Tolerance.org.

Current Practice:

This year a Family Engagement subcommittee was created within the District's Diversity/Equity committee. That committee has been working on developing recommendations for increasing family engagement throughout the district, which may ultimately include professional growth opportunities for both teachers and parents. During that work, they have referenced the Teaching Tolerance resources mentioned above as well as other related resources from scholars in the field.

4. COMMENT SHARED:

Went to principal to about to talk about something that happened and 9/10 times it's not going to be handled. Resources are needed in Brighton, new curriculum, let parents feel heard.

Disturbed by the music curriculum. Black students drop chorus every year. Music selections make it hard for them to connect. Plays do not have enough diversity. Why did TCMS do Hairspray? Students alienated by the curriculum.

Possible Solutions/Action Steps Suggested for Consideration:

Current Practice:

Principals and assistant principals do focus on following up in every situation, but feedback is certainly welcome when one feels that they haven't. Parents and community members are encouraged to follow up with principals and eventually with the superintendent if they feel that an issue is not being addressed.

Three years ago, the music department did an analysis of enrollment data in our vocal and instrumental ensembles and concluded that, even though we start every student in 4th grade on an instrument or chorus, we lose students of color at a greater rate that we do Asian and white students.

The music teachers have been very reflective about the selection of repertoire for the vocal and instrumental music programs. In the past two to three years, there has been an increased focus on selecting material from a more diverse range of cultures and backgrounds. This includes increase in pieces from female composers, composers of color, and pieces outside of the western European classical tradition.

This past summer, the VPA teachers engaged in a workshop day with Jason Holmes (currently the Director of Educational Programming at the Boston Children's Choir) to discuss this very topic and learned a great deal from him about cultural sensitivity and creating opportunities to engage and retain students from diverse backgrounds. To provide a "mirror" for our students of color, our elementary band students also spent a workshop day last spring with Herb Smith from the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra that concluded in a wonderful concert.

With regard to the choice of the musical "Hairspray" this fall at TCMS, that choice was a calculated one based on the turnout and interest in the previous year's middle school musical. There was an incredibly diverse group of students at auditions for "Mary Poppins" in 2017 and the directors thought that they would see the same level of diversity represented in the auditions for "Hairspray" in 2018. That did not play out the way it was anticipated.

5. COMMENT SHARED:

Students of color are overrepresented in special education. Extended studies have students of color underrepresented. That’s due to teacher recommendation and that’s a weak link. Not having students of color in AP courses hurts those students and the white students in those classes.

Possible Solutions/Action Steps Suggested for Consideration:

Provide support to students who need help with study skills. Provide students with learning challenges opportunities to access accelerated courses.

Current Practice:

The sub-group of the Diversity Committee is studying the special education data. The data shows that students of color are over-represented. At this time, the committee has not made any recommendations but will be meeting throughout the spring to continue the dialogue.

With respect to the makeup of our extended studies/accelerated courses; the District recognized this disparity several years ago and has made efforts to correct. Specifically, we have focused on increasing the number of students of color taking at least one AP course and this year and expanded our identification process for accelerated math to include mathematical dispositional thinking. While this is the first year we're using that updated process for math, we are hoping that it will help us increase the numbers of underrepresented populations in the coming years. With respect to our efforts to increase participation in AP courses, we are starting to see a difference. See data table below:

	2018-19	2017-18
% Graduating seniors with 1 or more AP Courses – BHS	71%	70%
Percentage of graduating class that took 1 or more AP exams – <u>nationwide</u>		38%
Percentage of graduating class that took 1 or more AP exams – <u>NYS</u>		42%
% AA seniors with 1 or more AP - BHS	44%	22%
% white seniors with 1 or more AP - BHS	73%	68%
% Asian seniors with 1 or more AP - BHS	83%	85%

6. COMMENT SHARED:

Dr. Kevin McGowan in a meeting would not admit to institutional racism in the staff. Felt the need to be protective of the staff over students. Doesn’t think administration wants to hear about these problems.

Possible Solutions/Action Steps Suggested for Consideration:

Administrators probably know who problematic teachers are and can do something about it.

Current Practice:

The district works closely with staff members to provide additional support, professional development and guidance. Our staff is as committed to excellence as everyone else in the community and takes pride in continuous growth and excellence in their performance.

We absolutely want to hear about problems and work as a team to develop solutions. Our goal is to be supportive of everyone in confronting challenges and finding ways to improve. We've been more than ready to acknowledge areas in need of improvement and have done so often in these discussions.

7. COMMENT SHARED:

Majority of community needs to listen to other people.

Possible Solutions/Action Steps Suggested for Consideration:

Don't need to look outside, look to minorities within the community.

Current Practice:

We agree. Be the Healing is just one way we are looking to develop better spaces for listening. The "Thought Exchange" regarding foot patrols was another. We'd like to know more and look forward to engaging the entire community in these important conversations.

8. COMMENT SHARED:

Non-neurotypical students don't have access to same resources. Can we expand Diversity & Equity to include other grouping of students?

In the United States, police kill unarmed Black kids. What will BCSD do about it? What can district teach? Brighton Police Department officers enter BHS and socialize with security guards, but it makes students uncomfortable. Police aren't friendly and don't talk to students. Why are they armed?

Possible Solutions/Action Steps Suggested for Consideration:

Curriculum Committee is designed to look at institutional racism and these hard questions. Decrease likelihood of children of color being at risk by revisiting BHS police in school. Maybe can improve security so police aren't needed?

Current Practice:

Special Education is currently a sub-group of the Diversity/Equity Committee and will continue to be focus in the work.

The BPD is not currently working in school and there are not any plans to do so. We will be exploring ways to build positive relationships between students and police officers. Our security staff receives regular training and support. They will be a part of implicit bias training as well.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS/COMMENTS/CONCERNS:

- All white teachers hired this past summer. Glad to see these steps taken to address this. This is not necessarily the case, but we are actively engaged in this important aspect of the work.

The Hiring Practices subcommittee is working on the following actions plans to recruit and retain a more diverse teaching faculty:

We are developing and integrating protocols to ensure fairness and consistency in the hiring process by developing search process guidelines/procedures. The Recruitment work group of the Hiring Practices Committee, utilizing the expertise of Renee Baker, is researching innovative approaches to network and outreach to an ethnically diverse teaching staff. Starting in March, we will begin executing the recruitment strategies developed.

- Put out timeline publicly. Our annual strategic plan (Blueprint) will continue to include specific dates and timelines.
- Hold each other accountable. White families need to talk with kids. White families need to follow the lead of people of color.
- Literature for high school students from a different perspective, authors of color.
6-12 ELA teachers are actively working to expand the selection of literature to be more inclusive.
- There has been lip service from BCSD in the past. There are discriminatory teachers. Please be sure and report this so that it can be addressed. We do not believe that staff members are discriminatory and are proud of the many ways they have led the way in engaging in important discussions related to diversity and equity.
- Brighton engages in some exceptionalism. Makes it more difficult to introspect on some of the challenges. Resist temptation to label people who point out challenges as being individual issues not reflective of what goes on in BCSD.
- There is some fatigue because communication is good, but participatory decision making not so good. Not just having a couple of parents on committee.

STRENGTHS OF FORUM:

- Being able to say what you want to say
- Thinking long-range plans
- Posture of listening and learning

HOW CAN WE IMPROVE FORUM?:

- More diversity in participation of forum (largely female participation, lots of privileged people in the room), make it more accessible
- Invite police and other stakeholders
- Small group participation or written participation for less vocal people
- Student cohort to answer questions from teachers and tell stories

HOW TO ENSURE BETTER IMPACT?:

- It's problematic that administrators are running the committees. Nothing will change like that. Have subcommittees without administrative staff that deliver recommendations and timelines.
- Have suggested topic to talk about at dinner with kids to advance this discussion on diversity. Could send via email.
- It's powerful that District is looking at these topics and having training.

WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS REGARDING ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPORTING BACK?:

- Timeline and communication via district email
- Make the process more transparent. Give updates on how you're tackling these issues.
- Direct administrator feedback
- Disappointed that superintendent and other administrators aren't here. *(Note: superintendent was out of town the entire week on a scheduled and planned conference in NYC to attend a Diversity and Equity Conference and research successful Restorative Practice and Equity in Access programs with teachers, principals and the Board vice president.)*
- Administrators shouldn't just listen, they need to talk and be part of community
- The phrase "reporting back" is problematic. Should be ongoing conversation, no hierarchy. No "us vs. them"

Notes compiled by:

- Astrid Scahill, Molly Sifling, Dariel Guerra, and Hailey Doescher
 - Dan Goldman, BCSD Communication Director
 - Marlowe V.N. Washington, Diversity Consultant
- [Responses compiled by district administrators](#)

December 20, 2018