

Advisory Committee for Acceptance and Diversity

First meeting, January 9, 2014, 7 pm, T.C. Passios Building, Room 13.

In attendance:

Gregory Berthiaume	School Committee	present
Michael Mackin	School Committee	present
Robert Ebersole	Board of Selectmen	present
Charlene Stephens	Community-at-large	present
Richard Beardmore	Community-at-large Alternate	present
Nicole Hennessy	Student Representative	present
Casey Voyer	Student Alternate	present
Elizabeth Rawlinson	Parent	present
Darruene Vann	Parent	present
Bob Meek-LaVeck	Parent Alternate	present
Paul Bertrand	Parent Alternate	not present

Also present, Loxi Calmes, Superintendent of Schools.

The meeting was called to order at 7:02pm by Greg Berthiaume as Chair of the School Committee.

Lunenburg Town Clerk, Kathy Herrick was at the meeting, distributed the open meeting and ethics law handouts, and then swore in all the members present.

Election of officers – upon motion and second the following were unanimously elected as officers of the Committee: Charlene Stephens, Chair; Elizabeth Rawlinson, Vice Chair; Robert Ebersole, Secretary

Discussion of charge and path forward

As adopted at the 11/20/13 and 12/4/13 School Committee meetings:

“The Advisory Committee for Acceptance and Diversity will be charged with assessing the cultural climate and tolerance and diversity status in district and recommend changes and improvements to our program. How can we improve tolerance, respect and diversity in our district? Make recommendations on personnel changes, programs, and recommendations for policy changes that are necessary to ensure we have created an environment that is supportive of diversity. Provide a ballpark budget figure in March for any changes they recommend. The Advisory committee’s charge should be complete by end of school year.

Composition: Two school committee members, one member from the Board of Selectmen, one student, one alternate student, one community-at-large member, one community-at-large alternate, and two parents.”

Note that the Administration is working with faculty on a parallel track as this committee. Also, at the High School, students are working on what is going on there.

A question arose whether this committee would have recommendations to the whole town. We are going to start with the school and then perhaps telescope into the community, possibly with events such as the band concerts, bonfire, and PTO fair.

We discussed what is included in the definition of Diversity – race, sexual orientation, socio-economic, cultural. This may need to be defined further when we work on the acceptance component of our charge.

The committee discussed many aspects of the charge:

What is going on now?

Policies and Procedures are on the school website. How do we get data that is already out there? What are markers of our healthy culture. The superintendent will distribute info that she has available. Fitchburg State University may have additional information and serve as a resource.

Upper grades -- Handbooks are signed by parents and students, but many students see it as another homework assignment and unknown how many read it. Lower grades – contracts are signed

There is a Circle of Power & Respect smaller group in Middle School and similar for Elementary. No vehicle for Secondary.

For years the schools have actively worked on bullying and diversity to make the schools safe and respectful.

How does the school communicate? Letters to home. FaceBook has limitations – how to manage with existing staffing. Not everyone has a computer.

How do we accomplish our charge?

Discussed that we would brainstorm and try to stay at a higher level for recommendations, and then let the school administration implement.

Specific things that we brainstormed that may help what we want to accomplish.

Have speakers closer in age to students. Examples: Chris Heron, Facing History/Facing Ourselves.

Have each class sponsor an even – so four events each year – keeping it fresh, different for each grade, students have a voice

Student exchange program – with another school. Cultural Exchange – Joint efforts with Art, Music, Sports, science, Electronics – then merge together.

Start of school year activities – football, in the past October fair.

Challenges:

Primary/Elementary – time to do this? High School – group assembly-limited time.

Parents and how what happens at home affects what we recommend. Some students can talk with friends but not parents. Some parents are not involved. Parents may be involved based on specific activities – athletics, music other events.

Socio-economic impact – which parents have the time to go to events or pay for extra items? This has led to the rise of the Booster Club involvement. User fees have become a barrier to involvement – some do not want to self identify as a person in need. The school has made a special effort to make events and activities affordable through a safety net. The School Committee has a goal to eliminate or reduce user fees.

Next Meeting:

At our next meeting we will utilize a project management tool proposed by Charlene, whereby everyone will use sticky notes to list items for us to consider. Everyone will present their comments, without discussion, so that everyone hears. The sticky notes will then be put on the board and like items put together. Everyone will have the opportunity to move items. When this is done, we will review the outcome. Some items may be valuable, but outside of our charge or need additional work. They will be recorded and presented along with our recommendation as items to be considered in the future. (Put on the “parking lot” page)

Homework for Committee: Review all policies and procedures on the Schools website. Review materials to be sent to us by the Superintendent. Be prepared to start into the project management exercise. Review minutes and bring comments or corrections to the next meeting.

Future meetings:

All at 7 pm at TC Passios Room 13

January 30, 2014

February 6 and 27, 2014

March 13 and 27, 2014

The meeting was adjourned at 8:58 pm.