

**New Hope – Solebury School District  
Equity Committee Meeting Minutes  
September 21, 2021**

Dr. Lentz called the meeting to order at 3:35 PM. The meeting took place simultaneously on Zoom and in person. There were approximately 30 attendees in person.

Members introduced themselves to begin the meeting. Dr. Lentz provided a recap of last year's accomplishments, discussions, and action plans (available here <https://www.nhsd.org/cms/lib/PA01001961/Centricity/Domain/4/2021-02-17%20Equity%20Townhall%20Presentation.pdf> ), including the upcoming curriculum audit with Harrisburg Area Community College, one of the three major groups undertaking equity audits in the region. Mr. Pedersen gave an update on the student equity committee, which is having its first meeting in early October. Last year students piloted a peer equity program with 5<sup>th</sup> graders at the UES and had great conversations. Looking to expand this program this year. They also ran a fundraiser for athletic gear for an underserved district; brought in a speaker on mental health; and discussed partnering with other student equity groups.

Dr. Lentz responded to a member question with regards to the definition of equity vs equality and the meaning of diversity. New members and those interested can find these definitions and all previous discussions on these topics on the district website's Equity page here: <https://www.nhsd.org/Page/2289>

Dr. Lentz reviewed the committee expectations and the objectives for 2021-2022, which includes a 5-year plan and a possible parent equity group.

Mrs. Miller reported that best-selling author and educator Kwame Alexander is visiting each building in October – at the ES, he will be conducting poetry lesson plans and doing a Q&A on writing techniques. At the MS/HS, there will be a community event and a public Q&A. More information forthcoming from Stephanie Yoder. <https://kwamealexander.com/>

Question from a new member regarding data on inequities in the district. Dr. Lentz discussed the community survey findings from last year that point to students feeling marginalized or unsupported due to race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and other factors. Academic data for the district show the need for increased growth and supports in Special Education and English Language Learner populations.

Discussion around equity committee's goals in raising students who are culturally competent – this lack has been shown to put graduates at a serious disadvantage. Mrs. Miller emphasized a focus on character traits and social/emotional intelligence at the UES, supported with literature. Mrs. Costigan offered to share a report on the importance of character building in addressing achievement gaps [emailed to members, see links below]

“This is a great summary of the research about the connection between early social competence and long-term economic and health benefits: [Improving Social Emotional Skills in Childhood Enhances Long-Term Well-Being and Economic Outcomes](#)

Also, there are ample reports on research and best practices for supporting equity, social competence, and educational outcomes. Here are a few:”

[Applying an Equity Lens to Social and Emotional Development](#)

[Equity and SEL - CASEL School Guide](#)

[Advancing Social and Emotional Learning \(SEL\) as a Lever for Equity and Excellence: Insights from School Districts:](#)

Breakout groups discussed goals for the coming year, potential partners and programs. Suggestions included:

- Connect with APEX projects
- More peer groups
- Curriculum planning along K-12 continuum. Mrs Miller reported on what is currently in process at the UES, talking about respect and representation in grade-appropriate concepts; it's ok to be different; creating safe spaces; grades 9-12 could be more forward thinking – what does it mean to be a global citizen?; empathy discussions at all grade levels]
- One book/one district program
- Make equity understandable to community – often defined based on individual fear/anxiety
- Kids cannot achieve if they are not represented and supported
- Data shows that support leads to academic growth
- LGBTQIA+ support at the MS level
  
- Examine the curriculum to look at cultural competency – ours is too Eurocentric – needs to include more histories/contexts of diverse groups
- Include intersectionality- disability and other “invisible” differences
- Small improvements have big returns in shifting norms – ie asking for preferred pronouns in class. Look for ways to improve inclusion and safety
  
- Expand APEX, looking for more opportunities in equity context
- Look to alumni – recent grads could return to campus to discuss experience, serve as models. How were they prepared? What are the gaps?
- Challenge norms by making small changes – ie discussion of religious holidays, what are student experiences? What are cultural practices? Acknowledge and celebrate differences in the classroom.
  
- How do we translate discussions around diversity and inclusion into programs and action?
- What are the links between welcoming and success?

A survey was sent to members to determine the preferred times for meetings. 3:30 PM was determined to be too early for some staff and 6:00 PM too early for working parents. Stay tuned for an update on the times, which will alternate each month between afternoons and evenings. Virtual attendance will remain an option. The next meeting is scheduled for October 26, time TBA.