

**New Hope-Solebury School District**  
**Minutes of the Equity Committee Town Hall**  
**May 3, 2022**

There were approximately 8 members of the public in attendance in person, in addition to the panelists, and approximately 20 on Zoom.

Dr. Lentz summarized the recent work of the Equity Committee since its founding in 2020. The committee is defining its areas of work; collaborating with community agencies and municipalities to ensure greater support for our students, faculty and staff; and developing a multi-year plan to be embedded in district operations. Details can be found here: <https://www.nhsd.org/Page/2289>

Dr. Lentz introduced the panelists: Dr. Minitti, Asst Superintendent; Liz Sheehan, Board Director and committee co-chair; Betsy Halsey, MS faculty and equity coordinator; Dawn Ferber, MS faculty and equity coordinator; Sarah O’Hara, HS faculty and equity coordinator; and Jackie Miller, UES teacher and LES/UES equity coordinator (absent), Eva Houlton and Alex Ren, student equity committee members.

Dr. Lentz reviewed the committee code of conduct and the definition of equity in education, which comes from the PA School Board Association, and noted that the committee is currently working on a five-year plan with the Equity Director from PSBA. The vision and mission of the committee are aligned with the district’s Comprehensive Plan as well as the qualities outlined in the Profile of a Graduate. Dr. Lentz noted that data show that the workforce is looking for culturally competent employees, people who can work in diverse teams. We can achieve that through exposure and representation in curriculum, programming, and relationships. Most importantly we need to ensure we are providing equal opportunities for learning for all of our students.

The summary of 2021-2022 objectives include:

- Professional development for faculty and staff
- Curriculum audit
- Curriculum review
- Equity programming
- Expanding teacher resources
- Expanding the student equity committee
- Embark on the 5 year plan
- Conduct committee conversations on equity topics
- Create a parent equity group
- Participate in minority recruitment fairs
- Advancing equity action plan with PSBA
- Demographic research

Elementary Equity Initiative – Jackie Miller (presented by Betsy Halsey and Sarah O’Hara)

- Four themes taken from the profile of a graduate: inclusive, empathetic, resilient, collaborative
- Connected to literature and related lesson plans
- April’s lesson was “resilient” – they discussed grit and how to use it to solve problems in our community. The students designed a thinking process whereby they identified a problem (“we need more teachers”) and came up with solutions.

#### Middle School Initiative – Betsy Halsey

- Ongoing No Place for Hate framework
- MS students are unique in their desire to fit in while establishing independence
- They did a series of “stamping out hate” advisory lessons
- Kwame Alexander visit included student poetry reflections, “windows and mirrors” exercise including lessons on perspective, reflections on their own beliefs inspired by the author
- Mikayla’s Voice program – organization that promotes disability advocacy – “Wheels of Friendship” – students designed a tile mural
- Humans of New Hope project video

#### High School – Sarah O’Hara reported

- Humans of New Hope HS version – students wrote interview questions and others answered. Great discussions about cultural identity. These videos are linked on the district website here: <https://www.nhsd.org/Page/2407>
- Partnership with 5<sup>th</sup> grade classes for lessons on empathy
- No Place for Hate
- Leadership opportunities for students: DVCEE High school leadership conference
- Kwame Alexander visit

#### Student Equity Committee – Eva Houlton and Alexandra Ren

1. Curriculum discussions – teachers are very open to ideas. Studies could be broadened to include more identities and cultural groups – what are their contributions to the world? Elementary partnerships went well – the 5<sup>th</sup> graders were much more educated on equity topics than they expected. No Place for Hate videos and poetry writing project – students wrote about identity and perspectives, differences in community. The leadership conference was very beneficial, great to hear from other districts.
2. Future needs and plans – we need more education on equity K-12. Go beyond definitions. Peer education in HS would help improve the culture – need lessons on language, respect, and choosing words wisely. Bring in more speakers and programs. The student equity committee has been “super important to have peers listen to peers.” Biggest need is changing school culture to make it more accepting.

Dr. Lentz concluded his presentation with an overview of current and future work: the 5 year plan, ongoing professional development, finalizing the curriculum audit, recruiting diverse staff, engaging more with community through municipalities.

Public comment: questions were submitted in advance of the presentation.

- “What are the goals for the 2021-22 school year?” Dr Lentz covered in the beginning (see slide show). Student committee: our group is doing outreach to other districts and within HS. Friends reaching out to peers in other schools for information on other equity groups. More student involvement is key to learning what to focus on.
- “Are you teaching Critical Race Theory?” No. Critical Race Theory is a graduate level investigation of systemic racism from a legal perspective. We are working to broaden representation within our curriculum and operations in order to achieve our stated goals.
- “How are we dealing with bullying, particularly with the LGBTQ population?” With both discipline and education. We need communication home so parents can be partners in

education. Dr Lentz explained we have a strong community network to help us with these issues. We need to continue to teach students how to stand up for their friends and how to report problems. We need to be proactive in teaching students what language is acceptable and what is offensive and why.

- “Who determines the definitions of equity – the district or the government?” The district determines its needs through surveys, interviews, committee member feedback, student reports, etc. The actual definition of equity in education came from PSBA. Dr. Minitti added that equity as a lens for district operations means looking at scheduling, time, supports, college and career readiness, access to programs – it is not just curriculum. We need to provide the best opportunities for all students. What are the barriers to participation and how can we eliminate them?
- “Are there attempts to have “elements of equity” throughout the curriculum?” Looking at access, diversity, representation (like women in science), differentiated curriculum. Yes. We are looking at all of these supports. Equity audit will help us determine the gaps.

Open public comment.

- “How do we educate children when there is resistance to diversity at home?” By teaching the basics: all students should be treated with respect and kindness. Focus on behavior without an agenda. Change the student culture – if respect is ultimately everyone’s value, outliers will feel uncomfortable and that will lead to change. Peer motivation is critical. We need to respect different beliefs – we’re not interested in making everyone believe the same ideals, but the baseline is respect.
- “At what point is it age appropriate to have discussions about gender identity at the LES? When do you teach kids about what it means to be gay?” These are not issues that are taught at the LES. It would not be a teacher’s role to have that discussion. Gender and sexuality is taught at the high school level in agreement with state standards in the health curriculum.
- Repeat questions about the books *Lawn Boy* by Jonathan Evinson and *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe followed. Dr Lentz reiterated the recently revised book challenge process and repeated that the committee’s vote, after review, was to keep both of those titles in the high school library collection. Inaccuracies in the questioner’s description of the books were clarified and Dr Lentz reminded the audience that parents can request that their children not have access to specific titles.