

New Hope Solebury Equity Committee
Minutes November 15, 2022

Dr Lentz called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. There were 7 people on zoom, 10 in person.

Introductions

Equity Audit review – Dr Armenta Hinton, VP of Engagement, Retention and Inclusion and Title IX Coordinator at Harrisburg Area Community College

Exec summary & suggestions – from what she has reviewed NHSD is meeting many challenges head on. Foundation is all there. Culturally responsive curriculum in progress using Steinharz School at NYU’s model/toolkit with Dr Benolken. Looked at syllabi for some courses then looked at policies to confirmed that there is no bias. We are ahead of some colleges: “doing brave things in our policies” – but is that communicated well? Is it present in faculty/staff hiring and onboarding? She can see district is trying to create an environment of belonging. Definition of equity needs to be consistent, but she can see we are trying to make it foundational despite our racially homogenous community. What else can we do?

Suggestions:

1. Biggest recommendation is around policy. She made 9-10 recommendations around consistency. Title IX is a big issue right now in many schools. It should be someone’s actual job – including looking at Title IX interaction with Titles 6, 7, and 2. We need an expert – consultant? Title IX coordinator should be listed on website and all documentation. They should always know about reporting. We need to identify our coordinator online and in all district materials.
2. Student handbook should have information about how to report discrimination – how, to whom, etc. Be explicit in how to report.
3. In order to reach our goals we need to unify the approach to the policy. Remove language on dealing with incidents on a “case by case basis” – approach must be consistent – follow standards and processes – ie ensure equitable application of policy.

Dr Hinton marked up policy and gave to Dr Lentz. Suggested more graphics, examples to make it understandable/readable/accessible.

Next steps – imagine what it will look like if we had a person whose job it was to do this work. Can’t be HR, too busy. Title IX changes with shifts in federal administrations. We must name coordinator and show hierarchy – what is their role? PD, student safety, etc. Title IX regs changing, likely at the beginning of new year, to be more manageable for districts. Who has the interest and the bandwidth to be the coordinator?

Q from committee - Could coordinator also be equity officer? A: Yes. Dr Hinton has that role at HACC.

Dr Hinton was impressed with NHSD’s “transgender piece, particularly in athletics” – most districts miss that. Keep up the good work. We are a model for other districts.

Dr Hinton will come to next Policy Committee meeting in Dec to present in more detail and discuss revisions.

Curriculum and Professional Development update – Dr Benolken

Our 2 English Language teachers and Dr Benolken are taking a virtual conference on equity in ELL (English Language Learners) teaching. Wonderful presenters, could evolve into possible Feb PD turnaround sessions. Gratz College coming in for Feb showcase to do a session on Teaching Tolerance. Tomorrow Dr Benolken is participating in Penn GSE programming and will report back.

Curriculum – we adopted NYU scorecard used to audit our curriculum – now part of our 5 year review process to assess our evaluation, alignment with standards. Dr Hinton introduced scorecard to secondary Social Studies dept – they learned how to use it to evaluate curriculum.

The curriculum team is discussing a new reading program at Elementary level and evaluating whether proposed textbooks & literature choices are culturally responsive, diverse, representative.

PA Dept of Ed just released new culturally relevant program framework guidelines for teacher preparation and education. Guidelines would be integrated into induction program and into professional development. More information coming. Great to have framework from the state to measure success in equity. Link to new guidelines here: <https://www.education.pa.gov/Documents/Teachers-Administrators/Certification%20Preparation%20Programs/Framework%20Guidelines%20and%20Rubrics/Culturally-Relevant%20and%20Sustaining%20Education%20Program%20Framework%20Guidelines.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2IRAVrjuwVEsdyV2NIDwPDS7IUXgSoZdJb-wSFhRPvwthgYPiDRDz2SQ>

Dr Lentz summarized that all of these initiatives are in line with our district comprehensive plan.

Updates from equity coordinators –

Mrs Halsey: MS – No Place For Hate (NPFH) pledge signing recently took place. Fun day “wear the shoes that are you” project in partnership with spirit club where kids spent time expressing themselves. “Humans of New Hope” campaign happening again – short videos of low-risk question/interviews with students – door to open to find connections with others – geared toward safe conversations.

Ms OHara – HS has an active student equity committee – meeting regularly – great discussions. First committee project was on the importance of youth vote and election awareness. Spoke to ADL coordinator about holding a future mock election. Prepping next NPFH project on tackling bias. Also did NPFH signing in homeroom period.

Ms Miller – ES – continuing monthly themes through literature. Looking at School-wide Positive Behavior Support Systems (SWPBS) – targeting struggle areas & putting that info into lessons, like conflict resolution on playground – how to handle situations that come up between students. Year 2 partner w BCIU – innovation and equity – made a “holidays around the world” museum at the LES on display for American Education Week.

Liz Sheehan gave a community update on situations in neighboring districts – keep an eye on negative situations in CB and Pennridge – make sure we are listening to students and keeping them at the heart of our mission. Look to North Penn as a model of great work in equity – could we bring them here to talk with us?

Q from committee on bystander training – are we continuing formal workshops for students? ie what to do/say when you see something? Does this guidance happen in curriculum or SWPBS? Ms OHara – HS is very socially aware – they have very open discussions about how to combat bias – Mr Sasse also discussed fighting bias/discrimination at the beginning of the year with students. What is the best opportunity for reception and practice? Ms Halsey reported that at the MS bystander/upstander issues are addressed in many ways. Social/Emotional Learning is one facet, SWPBS, lessons on bias at macro/micro levels. Done in more overarching way. Not just equity committee. Dr Benolken said Social/Emotional Learning committees at EL & secondary levels provide more opportunities for us to interface with kids ie future Lunch & Learn programming.

ChickFilA conversation – Dr Lentz reported that a community member questioned a football team fundraiser partnership with ChickFilA because of the restaurant’s well-known anti-LGBTQ history. The committee meeting was a good opportunity for educational moment to discuss issues with group. Dr Lentz consulted our solicitor and administration - we have to be careful on 1st amendment rights – we cannot “ban” a company. What are our other options? How do we address these concerns in the future? How do we educate students, district members on how to choose partnerships, etc? Committee comments as follows:

- Student equity committee has been discussing fact that we cannot change everyone. The best thing we can do is to arm people with information.
- Comment generated a great discussion & dialogue around & with the LGBTQ community
- use equity lens when planning any district events – ask these questions – we could have a template for people to use to vet companies
- very encouraging that this discussion happened. Can we come up with a checklist – committee should be a resource – how do we help others find this kind information?
- can we stay local with business relationships? Have list of suggested sponsors? highlight local establishments that are inclusive and align with our mission. Could have a sticker for preferred NHSD vendors. Make it visible that they are “approved” & align with our mission.
- teachable moment was great, this is what we strive for. Was handled with reason & respect. Great learning experience.
- it didn’t become a militant exercise, shows the specialness of NHSD – was not antagonistic – we had a great dialogue.
- Who originated the fundraiser? It was Hunterdon – but we have had others in district with ChickFilA
- could new Dept of Ed guidelines be used as a screen? Dr Benolken – the NYU scorecard has language that might be applicable. It asks you to consider what perspectives are being left out in any situation – a helpful lens for planning any events/making decisions that are inclusive.
- This rubric could also be used to evaluate opportunities for APEX, speakers, College/Career Pathways, etc.

Liz will look for any existing model screeners that districts might use to vet partner organizations.

Action plan for 2022-2023

What are our priorities – 5 key things we can work on this year out of the list from October’s meeting? (Themes were: Deepen Community Involvement and Student Engagement; Developing cultural

exchange opportunities; establish presentations and workshops; cross district/school activities; opportunities for students to expand cultural understanding through established activities and programs; expand cultural connections to established organizations and programs.

Three groups broke out then reported back:

1. Zoom group – student engagement focus – what are ways to get HS students talking and sharing? Find activities that make them feel comfortable. Lunch & Learn next year, block learning strategies – non-verbal movement, etc. Expanding book clubs, movie nights, partnerships with other places. How are we communicating our work?
2. Group 1 – district should have an equity/title IX coordinator position to coordinate across the district; many conversations happening among many committees. Data collection – how do we know if our efforts are working? We could survey kids before & after programming as was done with Michaela's Voice. Form a cross-county equity committee – a coalition of Bucks district equity groups to learn from and support one another. Would like to develop more K-12/community programming, ie Kwame Alexander model. Good for funding possibilities, deeper / sustained engagement across grade levels.
3. Group 2 – bring back cultural heritage night. HS Equity & Model UN and are on it, as well as groups from ES and PTG. Expand beyond food – HS is having meeting tomorrow – incorporate dance, music, games, etc. Connect to HS spirit days. Event will happen after winter break. Dr Lentz – student advisory groups want to help. Challenge Day – Mr Barth – held three times in Pennsbury and was wonderful – teachers chose kids for a retreat – great connection between fac and students – scripted program out of CA done with MS or HS. Check out www.Challengeday.org . Humans of New Hope coming back in HS as well. Having discussion about GSA for the MS.

Dr Lentz: We will compile and come back next month to figure out where to go with these ideas.

Next meeting December 13 at 4:00.