

EASTON, REDDING, REGION 9 JOINT BOARDS OF EDUCATION

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Task Force Special Meeting

May 25, 2021 6:00 PM.

Held Remotely Pursuant to Executive Order No. 7B

Zoom Meeting Link:

<https://zoom.us/j/93243109752?pwd=ZCtvZjFzc0Y0dW1ZY1NjOFNONGdmZz09>

Meeting ID: 932 4310 9752 - Passcode: 161060

Minutes

ATTENDANCE

Task Force: H. Whaley, J. Reilly, C. Parkin, C. Graziano, J. Berry, J. Stinson, J. Chieda, D. Wible, K. Blessey, R. Cerrone, D. Aponte, S. Falzone, J. Neal, B. Eriksen, F. Carter, D. Wallin, A. Velazquez, S. Pierson Ugol

Administration: Dr. Harrison

Members of the Public: several

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting of the ER9 Joint Boards of Education Task Force on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion was called to order by H. Whaley at 6:04 p.m.

TASK FORCE MEMBER COMMENT:

None

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: EDITED DEI SURVEYS

Task force reviewed the following changes made to the surveys after input from boards of education.

- Removed definitions of diversity, equity, and inclusion on all 4 surveys
- Shifted order of the sections to improve the overall flow
 - Moved up extracurricular activities
 - Combined Gender and Sexual Orientation questions into one section
- Broke apart the uncomfortable/embarrassed/humiliated questions into 3 separate questions
- Renamed headers to be more neutral
- Reworded a few questions to be more neutral
- Broadened the scope of the questions at the end of the survey to focus on inclusivity
- Deleted the demographics of "who can I turn to for help" question
- Deleted the "are you treated differently" question
- Re-phrased the question about sharing views in class.
- Added the option to self-describe gender identity.

C. Graziano commented that all of these changes are responsive to comments received from the public and board members.

It was stated that these surveys are opt-in.

D. Wible explained the process will be that parents will receive an email asking if they would like to receive the survey. If they click a link, they will receive a copy of the survey to review, and then have to opt their child into taking the survey.

J. Chieda offered that we add a question regarding if a student was in-school all year, or learning remotely.

D. Wallin said that the school climate survey was not changed in that regard.

S. Pierson Ugol suggested that students not limit their responses to just this past year.

B. Eriksen suggested that question be placed at the end of the survey so as not to suggest reporting be limited to just the most recent year.

R. Harrison stated that asking for cohort information might lead to identifying information.

H. Whaley said that it could just be asked if students were mostly in-person, at home, or a combination.

Motion: Move to approve all four amended surveys with the addition of the added question, “In the 2020-2021 school year were you a student were mostly at home, in-person, or a combination of the two” to the parent and student surveys. (Graziano, Wible).

J. Chieda stated that she has received many emails regarding the surveys.

C. Graziano thanked members of the public for their engagement and noted that the first instance of public comment came via a petition, whether agreed with or not, signed by over five hundred students, parents, and community members, and from a sheer numbers perspective, those outweigh the comments received in the past six months.

Amended Motion: Move to advance the surveys as amended and presented to the Task Force to the Easton, Redding, Region 9 Boards of Education for discussion at today’s board meeting with the amendments reviewed and the additional question added. (Graziano, Wible). Approved. Unanimous.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

J. Belfatto, Portland Avenue, Redding, said the irregularity of the school year can’t be understated and suggested it might be appropriate to wait a year.

S. Christie, Austin Drive Ext, Easton, expressed confusion on the self-describe option, the absence of ADHD as an option, she found question number nine to be leading, number ten did not give an opportunity to elaborate, number twenty did not offer an option to feel purposefully excluded, she asked why in number twenty-eight the word “resources” is used instead of “curriculum” noting that resources are incorporated outside of curriculum, she asked if the administration enforces its own rules, she stated that she knows it does not, so question thirty is a good one to answer, question thirty-one she stated that it is her experience that the group of people kids feel comfortable talking to is very narrow, number thirty-four she suggested asking who students felt are accepted in the school.

D. Benson, Pond Road, Easton, stated that he submitted an open letter, and that he is co-chairman of Save our Schools, he thanked the committee for making changes.

C. Cowherd, Silversmith Lane, Redding, stated she is a teacher at John Read Middle School, she thanked the committee for this work, and said that there is a definite need at the schools for them to identify kids who need teachers to reach out to them. She said the median age for kids to identify as LGBTQIA+ is twelve years old. She said giving kids the knowledge that adults around them know these things may be happening to them and that they may need support is huge. She said a Rainbow Club was started this year at the request of students, and there are now twenty members. She said she was on deck for five years waiting for a child to ask for this, and that it is glorious.

J. Ruben, Knapp Street, Easton, thanked the members for their service and time. She expressed support for the DEI Task Force and the surveys that protect and give a voice to groups in the community that need it. She said that ensuring the curriculum includes diversity, equity, and inclusion ensures the students become the best people they can be, and everything we do should be about the students. She said she reviewed the surveys and they are relevant and respectful.

L. Nelson, Deer Hill Road, Redding, said there is a lot of positive feedback, but she feels the exact opposite. She said she does not support the survey going out to students. She said that though the meeting notes are online, she was not aware of this. She said she heard many negative comments about this, and that members of the board don’t realize the negative consequences. She repeated that she and her husband are not supportive and are very vocal.

D. Gear, Ridgedale Road, Easton, said she had not seen the survey, and would appreciate a presentation of the goal and the impact it has on the curriculum. She asked if there is a developmental psychologist on the line and asked if you ask a child to identify their gender are you forcing a child to make a decision too early.

J. Logie, Rock House Road, Easton, asked about the five hundred signatures that went to the board moving this forward, but stated a lot of people don’t have an awareness of what is going on, where this information goes, and who gets it. She said that some parents are afraid to speak out because of retribution on social media. She mentioned turning in your neighbor and saying something negative about the community. She asked for transparency.

S. Christie, Austin Drive Ext, commented that the results of climate surveys have not been reported.

D. Propia, Portland Avenue, said she is new to the system, likes to think of herself as open-minded, and is glad the school is trying to diversify, but said it is inappropriate for middle schoolers to identify themselves. She said parents should teach kids about this, and if the parent is not on board, the school can't help.

MOTION: Move to adjourn (Stinson, Wible). Approved. Unanimous.

The ER9 Joint Boards of Education Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Task Force regular meeting was adjourned at 6:52 p.m.

Submitted by
Heather Whaley, ER9 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Task Force Chair