

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee Notes

Date: 11/5/2020

Submitted by: Andrew Scott and Diane Marsolini

Time: 6:30-8:15 PM

Location: Zoom (Link sent separate)

Attendees: Andy Corey, Diane Marsolini, Catie Parikh, Marie Ramas MD, Andrew Scott, Gerrell Smith, Tiffany Testa,

Absent: Dave Werner

In our small group on definitions, discussion this week centered on the word 'diversity' It started with Andrew proposing we start with the University of Michigan DEI definitions as the baseline for our work:

Defining diversity, equity and inclusion

At the University of Michigan, our dedication to academic excellence for the public good is inseparable from our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. It is central to our mission as an educational institution to ensure that each member of our community has full opportunity to thrive in our environment, for we believe that diversity is key to individual flourishing, educational excellence and the advancement of knowledge.

Diversity: We commit to increasing diversity, which is expressed in myriad forms, including race and ethnicity, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, language, culture, national origin, religious commitments, age, (dis)ability status, and political perspective.

Equity: We commit to working actively to challenge and respond to bias, harassment, and discrimination. We are committed to a policy of equal opportunity for all persons and do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, disability, religion, height, weight, or veteran status.

Inclusion: We commit to pursuing deliberate efforts to ensure that our campus is a place where differences are welcomed, different perspectives are respectfully heard and where every individual feels a sense of belonging and inclusion. We know that by building a critical mass of diverse groups on campus and creating a vibrant climate of inclusiveness, we can more effectively leverage the resources of diversity to advance our collective capabilities.

We started with the word Diversity

Gerrell mentioned he joined the committee for diversity 'for all' Pointed out disability and ability...liked how both were included.

Tiffany liked definition as well, pointed out identities. Group discussed if the definition was diverse enough? We decided against ending with something like 'etc.' Tiffany also highlighted the importance of political perspectives and students being able to explore diversity of thought and different ideologies.

Caitie - appreciated definitions being short and to the point. Mentioned adding some from the PTA document. Physical appearance, lived experiences, abilities, learning styles

Things are so divisive and are being discussed on our community social networks and are being discussed in the schools. A child of a committee member mentioned a teacher completely gave away her political bias and her views recently in class. That should never happen as teachers should be neutral in their presentations and know the well thought out / best arguments from both sides to be able to foster a spirit of critical thinking, not indoctrination. In this case, a liberal teacher and a conservative student got into a political argument.

Discussion ensued: A teacher showing their political bias automatically will largely silence students who hold the opposite political beliefs (fear of reprisal, fear of getting worse grades, fear of looking dumb for going against the highly educated teacher etc). Setting the right tone for the classroom is a learned skill that should be a focus of our schools.

Andrew: 2 of his kids have gone completely through the HB school system. One other child is a junior. The best teachers are the ones where the kids come out of their class with absolutely no idea which direction they lean politically (Tiffany agreed). Goal should be for teachers to know the strongest arguments on both sides of a political or historical issue (particularly in social sciences and English where often the political leanings of the teacher are most often articulated) and guide students to think critically and charitably about various issues.

Viewpoint diversity is a big deal! Andrew referred to the information he sent in prior to the meeting. Brief discussion of antiracist vision versus humanist vision.

Segment 1: Beginning of talk to about the 25:00 mark

<https://youtu.be/6orCV4I7jjU?t=54>

Segment 2: Approximately the 49:00 minute mark to the 59:00 mark

<https://youtu.be/6orCV4I7jjU?t=2932>

Those who strongly hold to the antiracist vision (which is based on Critical Theory), believe that power dynamics / oppression between groups is very important. **Most people have the best of intentions....they hear a word like 'diversity' and think 'Yes! We want that!'** But within that worldview (for those who are very strong proponents of it...such as consultants which is one of the reasons there is a concern about outside consultants)...**for those strongly in the antiracist worldview there tends to be an ideological purity test that if you stray from it you are silenced or cancelled or called names / bullied. Read the commentary under diversity and also inclusion in the large definition document Andrew sent for more details.**

The second video (10 minute one) talks about how it will be healthy for society if these views are openly discussed. **It is important when we are talking about diversity that we are teaching**

our kids how to speak to one another even if we REALLY disagree with one another and still be able to respect one another at the end of the day and go get a cup of coffee. Return to the classic definition of tolerance... At some point the meaning of tolerance changed to mean 'if you don't agree with the way I think then you are intolerant and I can call you names, cancel you etc' It feels that way.

Andrew gave some examples from his daughters' experiences in the high school in particular where liberal teachers felt completely free to espouse their views on many political and cultural topics of the day to the point of mocking opposing viewpoints.

Example early in high school where a student said he was fine with gay marriage as people can do what they want in their own homes but thought it was terrible that Catholic adoption agencies were shutting down because the Church would not allow adoption into same sex couple homes and the government said they had to. The student made the point that there were other places where same sex couples could adopt and that he felt it was wrong to make the Catholic adoption agency shut down because it hurt kids who otherwise would find homes. Another student was so angry at his statement that she got up and yelled at him that he was a bigot and a homophobe. The teacher calmed the situation down but didn't address the tone of the angry response and policy wise actually sided with the angry student. My daughter learned that day that she needed to stay silent on controversial topics because she didn't want to be yelled at and she didn't want to get on the wrong side of teachers.

Tiffany spoke out against teachers behaving that way. Teachers need to be trained better on cultural awareness teaching and how to effectively handle situations like that. Job of teacher is to create a safe space for conversations like that to not get out of hand. If you don't have the skills to do it, then it is better not to have those kind of conversations. Teachers assume they have the skills. They also need to have a safe space to be able to say they are not comfortable having conversation with kids if they are not prepared (politics, infectious disease, protecting student's right to grow). **Tiffany mentioned that in the example I gave, the teacher didn't just shut down 1 child, the teacher actually shut down the entire class from being able to freely and honestly discuss things going forward).**

Andrew asked Tiffany about the term safe space and how he thinks that she is using that term in a healthy way to truly foster conversations...but in culture sometimes that reference to safe spaces or microaggressions is sometimes used to silence people who are in the perceived dominant group. Just wanted her to know that if she was at a school board meeting and talking about safe spaces at the microphone, some conservatives would likely filter that through a lens of silencing various opinions of those deemed to be in the oppressor groups. (to reiterate...Andrew doesn't think that is what Tiffany means at all when she uses the safe space term but its one of these culturally relevant terms that might need to be defined a bit if used in a document or in a presentation).

Tiffany pointed out that these terms in education mean different things....specifically a safe space is a place where every voice can be heard. And creating an environment where that is true for every voice. Addressing as best we can concerns about what various terms mean is a wise way to move forward with our discussions.

Andrew picked up on terms having different meanings in different spaces and gave an example of how we might define terms going forward so everyone is on the same page. Example: **When**

we say safe space in an educational setting, here is what we mean (define it). We do not mean silencing people or moving people away from others who hold a view different than theirs. We value freedom of speech. We want to prepare our kids to enter the world knowing that there are different viewpoints and that it is ok to hold different beliefs and still like / respect people who are different than you!

Gerrell: When you hear the term safe space, that probably means you are in a situation where you are not in a safe space! In other words, you are in a place where you are going to be talking about difficult things! He most wants to get out of this group is that we do the best we can help our kids be self aware...help them be able to articulate who they are and what they believe even if that belief is one that is not of the majority opinion. Be comfortable inside the individual regardless of groups etc. Would love for our kids to be able to speak openly. **Policy dictates behavior. What is our policy going to be to get to a point where our kids are that way....that this kind of thing resonates through the kids and the community. Be who you are as long as you are not negatively impacting others ON PURPOSE.** He made reference to the earlier discussion on how the nazi symbol can be viewed in so many different ways. Instead of stifling these things, we should create an environment that when someone says something like that people should seek to gain an understanding of what they meant versus assuming what they think the person(s) meant. We should strive to be a community that has resilient kids in a world that is always changing. That would be a great culture for our community to be known for.

Andrew mentioned speech at graduation that one of the Class of 2020 senior leaders gave which focused on being a people who seek to not just be tolerant of one another but to really seek to understand one another. Perhaps this could be something that we as a committee could put before the community as an expressed desire from our high school graduates and make it a strategic priority going forward to seek an elevated discourse of understanding and reject the concept of cancel culture or or name calling / bullying or shunning / blocking people we disagree with. Help our kids to confidently navigate in their world.

Here is the last 2 minutes of that speech from the Class President, Joshua

Ide: https://youtu.be/lhP3R_LevEQ?t=314

When time was running low, **Caitie said she had read the entire definitions document Andrew had sent out. She asked Andrew about the purpose of what he sent out. Did he object to the words themselves?**

Andrew said he has no problem with these words. The purpose was to educate because some of these words have been changed to mean different things by those who are strong adherents to Critical Theory (foundational theory behind the Antiracist vision).

Andrew wanted to make sure the community and the school boards really understand what they will be bringing into the schools if consultants are hired that hold strongly to these views (or leaders within the district are chosen to lead while holding these views). Most consultants these days hold to Critical Theory views, the views are ascendant within the culture, and they have been around long enough that we can see the early implications of widely implementing these ideas into society (ie cancel culture, lessening freedom of speech, more division in society).

Call ended due to time limit. Andrew would have added that even though he is an adherent to the MLK Humanist vision, **he does NOT believe that the vast majority of people who lean toward the antiracist vision are bad people or have evil intent. He does believe that the result of further implementation of Critical Theories (ie the antiracist vision) will result in more division and less healthy discourse.** We have seen enough real world (not just theoretical) examples of these theories in action that we can look to the future to get a better idea of what our society would look like if we continue to promote and implement such theories in our discourses. The commentary portion of the document Andrew sent out discusses those real world implications on what is actually happening. In the end, Andrew doesn't think that most people would support implementing these theories if they fully understood those implications. (End of small group minutes)

Statement Small Group During our breakout session, Andy, Marie and I worked on updating the resolution to clarify for the Community and Boards what the resolution is requesting of the Boards. We worked off of the resolution discussed with the larger group using the “warm” and “cool” input. The first document was our first draft. It includes a synopsis of our thoughts as we reviewed the resolution and comments. As we reviewed this document, it appeared to be moving more toward a Mission / Vision statement, which is not the role of this group. We then drafted an update that is closer to the original resolution. This document references SB263, which may not be the appropriate place for this background information but seems to be helpful information for the Community and Boards. They are still a work in progress. We are sending to the group for our meeting tomorrow. Hollis-Brookline Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Initiative Hollis-Brookline is an inclusive community that is committed to nondiscrimination and would like to clarify this commitment by clearly illustrating the importance of reflecting the intrinsic value and respect we have for all students, regardless of their individual experiences and perspectives. We believe in educational excellence and equity for all learners. In the spirit of the Hollis-Brookline School District mission statement, we recognize that our students come from diverse backgrounds, experiences and perspectives that enrich our community. By articulating and enhancing our concepts of DEI we will further help students acquire the knowledge and life skills for academic, social and emotional success, and “ensure a strong, supportive learning environment”. While the Hollis-Brookline community benefits from highly engaged families who commit both in time and financially to the advancement of their children, we also are sensitive to the fact that providing a template for our students to understand the world around them through an equity lens will help prepare them both socially and emotionally. Diversity and equity, while often illustrated through discussion of race, are integral in providing context to the unique needs of all our students. This includes students who are of different gender, primary language, disabilities, gifted learners, sexual orientation, religion or more. Our aim is to best prepare model servant-leaders within our community as they embark into their next phase of learning. Hollis-Brookline is committed to excellence and want to be intentional in creating a welcoming and nurturing environment for all. While other school districts within the state have had to develop policies regarding DEI, in response to events that developed, it is our intention to be explicit in the cultivation of a culture that values, respects and encourages our students to engage in difficult conversations. [recall school districts with DEI policies: Dover, Exeter, Hampton, Laconia] In envisioning the Cavalier of the future, we

hope to embrace and adapt existing frameworks from other institutions of higher learning ... [insert example of framework] The District understands that throughout a student's lifespan, there will be significant events that imprint their experiences during their pedagogy. These experiences not only effect their ability to learn, but they also can magnify existing inequities. [The current COVID-19 pandemic may bring unique challenges related to equity that are yet to be examined.] The Committee will: 1. Review and submit to the School Board's a suggested Resolution on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for the SAU 2. Evaluate the current Choose Love and CASEL frameworks and give suggestions on how to incorporate these models within the SAU-41 framework, from a student/family perspective 3. Provide on-going feedback on educational programming to the SAU administration to ensure continued growth regarding diversity, equity and inclusion. 4. Suggest possible waypoints to consider in the development the educational curriculum to reflect the above frameworks. 5. Serve as an interface between the district, the Hollis Brookline schools and community members to encourage collaborative goals in student development

The District will: 1. 2. 3. For information: Here is the SAU-41 Vision, Mission and strategic plan. I wonder if we can use the vision to structure our objectives/goals

MISSION AND VISION The mission of SAU 41 is to ensure a strong, supportive learning environment focused on academic excellence. The vision of SAU 41 is to help students acquire the knowledge and life skills for academic, social, and emotional success:

- The SAU 41 schools establish and fulfill standards for academic excellence that are competitive at the state, regional, national, and international levels as benchmarked against recommendations by renowned independent bodies.
- The SAU 41 schools educate students to be critical thinkers, creative problem- solvers, effective communicators, and socially responsible, engaged citizens who are college and workforce ready.
- The SAU 41 schools use data from multiple and varied assessments to improve student learning; every student makes or exceeds expected annual progress.
- The staff, services, and culture enhance student self-esteem and employ a variety of strategies to meet the academic, social, emotional, and safety needs of all students.
- The professional learning community evolves and adopts best practices for learning; administrators and staff members are supported in their work and are compensated fairly and competitively.
- The School Boards, administrators, and staff engage students, families, and the community through effective communication of priorities, plans, and progress.
- The school districts in SAU 41 are models for sound fiscal responsibility and integrity.
- Each district in SAU 41 has a comprehensive district report card that measures its performance against SMART goals

Hollis-Brookline Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Initiative SAU41 is committed to nondiscrimination and strives to be an inclusive community. The district recognizes that issues of diversity, equity and inclusion affect all members of the HollisBrookline community regardless of their background. NH Senate Bill 263 came into effect in September 2019 including: Section 193:39 Discrimination Prevention Policy Required. Each school district and chartered public school shall develop a policy that guides the development and implementation of a coordinated plan to prevent, assess the presence of, intervene in, and respond to incidents of discrimination on the basis of age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, color, marital status, familial status, disability, religion, national origin or any other classes protected under RSA 354-A. The District recognizes that unforeseen events may arise, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, that bring unique challenges related to equity that are yet to be examined. In envisioning the Cavalier of the future, it is the intention of the District to be explicit in the cultivation of a culture that values,

respects and encourages our students to engage in difficult conversations. For purposes of this resolution, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion are defined as: • Diversity: • Equity: • Inclusion: Therefore, may it be resolved that: 1. The SAU #41 school districts will make diversity, equity, and inclusion a strategic priority by actively supporting such efforts. 2. SAU #41 will review its policies and procedures relative to diversity equity and inclusion and release a plan to address its findings including proposed actions, including but not limited to, professional development, drafting new or editing existing policies and procedures, and curriculum review