

Fairbanks North Star Borough School District

Board Diversity Committee

MEETING NOTES

May 14, 2015

The following is a condensed version of the comments made during the meeting. For a complete record of the meeting you may listen to the audio minutes at <http://www.k12northstar.org/boe/meeting-minutes>.

The meeting was called to order by Bett Schaffhauser at 5:35 p.m. in the Board Room of the FNSBSD Administrative Center at 520 Fifth Avenue. The meeting began without a committee quorum and so Ms. Schaffhauser moved right into the new business of the “gathering perspective” theme of the meeting. She welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming. She shared that the reason was to take stock of the committee which started in 1997. A lot of time and events have passed since then and with the rich history and perspectives of past members they have a lot to offer. With both Bett Schaffhauser and Rebecca Burns retiring they would like to pass something along to the new administrative support staff. Ms. Schaffhauser asked that people introduce themselves and share their memories, visions and goals they would like to hand off to the next person.

**Tanya Mendelowitz**, is a teacher in the district who started attending meetings two years ago. She thinks this committee does very important work and she is very passionate about the work that is done here.

**Carol Lee Gho** was on this committee quite a while ago, then served on budget committee for four years. She taught in the district from 1982 until she retired in 2003, then she taught at UAF for eight years and retired again. She has 5 children who all went through district schools and graduated from West Valley High School between 1990 and 1999. She said this committee is kind of a watchtower to make sure things are happening as they should be. She feels it is a very important aspect of the school district.

**Georgia Sandgren** has been on the committee for 3 years. She said she loves the people she connects with and working on the issues that are brought up. She works with military families as the Military Student Transition Consultant with the Military Child Education Coalition.

**Larnetia Skipp**s has been on the committee for two years. She asks what we can do to empower people to work together. She has six children in the district. The oldest graduates on Tuesday from North Pole High, her youngest—twins--are in kindergarten. She and her husband retired from the Air Force in 2009. They are very involved with the North Pole community and schools.

**Kelley Egger** is the parent of two children one is a Kenyan American and the other child is a Kenyan Irish American and a 6<sup>th</sup> grader. He just spent three days working at Outdoor Days, and event in its 25<sup>th</sup> year sponsored by Fish and Game. They served 650 6<sup>th</sup> graders, giving them an introduction to opportunities in outdoor fields. He served on the committee when it was changing its name, 4-5 years ago. He became involved and saw it as an opportunity as a parent and community member to do some good work.

**Reverend Carlene Tillery** served on the committee about 14 years ago. She became involved because she had kids in the district and wanted to be a factor in their learning, not just for her kids but for all kids in the community. It was wonderful experience for her and the Black community as a whole and the church system.

**Anthony Tillery** is involved with the University's at the Hutchison culinary department. He helps students in the community who want to become a chef to better their career. He is

currently the assistant project manager at Fort Wainwright. He is also active in the local chef association. They have a booth at the summer state fair and they also do dinner for senior citizens there.

**Alex Amegashie** is affiliated with the district through his two kids who are students in the district. This is his second year on the committee. He is highly interested in bringing people together making sure we all work together to find better solutions for the community, to find better solutions; there is always room for improvement.

**Cynthia Henry** was on the school board when this committee was formed. The committee came about because of an incident and there needed to be a place for the parent to bring the issue and talk it out. Ms. Henry credits Sue Wilken with the foresight to put together this committee. Ms. Henry chaired the committee when she served on the school board. They had two students on the committee and had to be students of color. They felt teachers needed their consciousness raised to promote students of color to get into college track courses and push college and post-secondary training. Another goal was to have faculty reflect the student population percentage wise. Ms. Henry was recently appointed to the Alaska Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Their purpose is to bring issues to the Commission for review. She will share her contact information with this committee and encouraged them to share issues with her that may be forwarded to the federal commission.

**Ava Vent** is originally from Huslia. She is the mother of four children going to school in the district. She works as the Education Director for Tanana Chiefs Conference. Education Council members from sub regions of TCC region bring issues going on in rural Alaska to the council and they try to find action plans to solve the issues. There are about 3,131 students in TCC region; less than half go to school in Fairbanks. Ms. Vent thanked the committee for supporting the Traditional Chiefs' Day resolution.

**Jeanette Campbell** was on the first committee in 1997. She got involved because she was working with bilingual students in the district. She has four kids who went to school in the district; they are all grown now. She really loved the committee, it brings all ethnicities together and they took the Race and Healing class together. Ms. Campbell is currently semi-retired but very active in the community. She represents the Pilipino community and is very involved in what's going on like the International Friendship Day where all ethnicities work together as a team. Bett Schaffhauser added that Jeanette Campbell is the mother of a current committee member, Michael Campbell.

**Ana Richards** came to Alaska many years ago speaking very little English. She was immersed in University for months speaking Spanish and it was culture shock for her. When she connected with her community she had to learn the language of that community. As she got connected she saw we have more in common than differences. She started working at the school district in 1993, helping students learn English as a second language. In 2005 she went to work at the University for the Office of Multicultural Affairs. Moved in 2011 to the Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity. Currently serving as the co-chair for the Mayor's Diversity Committee. She served on this committee in 2005 for several years. Bett Schaffhauser added that Ms. Richards was recently honored by the Girl Scouts as a "woman of distinction."

**Helena Schreder** is currently the Assistant Director for Nutrition Services. She started out with the committee 16 years ago and was in that position for seven years until moving into her current position. She and her husband raised five kids in district until the youngest of them graduated in 2010. She learned a lot from committee and from the Race & Healing I and II classes. She learned so much from those classes and from participating in and listening to the concerns, goals and challenges of this committee, it has been invaluable. Ms. Schreder lost a son to suicide two years ago and her new passion is a new nonprofit, the Arctic Research Center for Suicide Prevention. The purpose is to provide local resources to the community. They also want to do outreach to Alaska's bush communities and do studies to see why the suicide rate is so high in the circumpolar regions.

**Bett Schaffhauser** has been involved with the committee since its beginning. She expressed appreciation for Sue Wilken's comments. (Sue Wilken's comments are attached at the end of these minutes.) As Sue said it all began with a crisis situation at Woodriver Elementary school. Bett recalls that there was another situation along racial lines at North Pole High School around the same time. It was a very tense and emotional time. Ms. Schaffhauser credits Sue Wilken for having the vision to make this committee a reality, and credits all those who supported her in that quest. She pulled together the group of First Responders and knew that she could count on them to address the issues. The first meetings were very tense, emotions were raw; the growth over the years is incredible. Ms. Schaffhauser said she loves coming to meetings, enjoys the shared laughter and good times and that wasn't possible at the beginning. Ms. Schaffhauser said she also credits the Race & Healing program for making positive changes in this committee and in the district. She too is sorry that the course is no longer available and suggested that perhaps one of the goals to come out of this exchange might be to make a recommendation to the Board to replicate the course. Another thing that she believes helped to change things is they started having food at meetings. Because of the time of meetings everyone needs some nourishment to feel good. Secondly, she believes there really is something to communion and breaking bread together and in that way building community. Dinner tonight is our way of thanking you for all the ways you have nourished us over the years. Thank you.

**Rebecca Burns** has been providing support to the committee for 8 years. It's been interesting and inspiring to see how each time new members join the committee the focus is a little different. It's interesting to see how each committee decides what issues are most important. Always it is with what is in the best interest of the students. Everyone has been very dedicated and each give it their all. I appreciate each and every one who has participated.

**Henry Gurley** was on the committee in the beginning with Cynthia and Bett, Helena and Jennifer. They were rough times. Kudos to Bett; he always appreciates working with her. They were both on the Board of Directors of the J.P. Jones Community Center, until Bett resigned. Like the rest he got involved with committee because he wanted to make a difference. It was tough at first because they had to bring up issues people didn't want to hear; but they were all committed and made it through those difficult times. First classes on healing racism were done by Mr. Gurley and Sheryl Conner and others and later turned over to Jesse Arrington and May Marsh. Mr. Gurley retired from Lathrop in 2009. Currently on Board of Directors at JP Jones Center, also the associate minister of music. He has a grandson in middle school who needs some extra help so Mr. Gurley got him into the Civil Air Patrol. He would like to get more minority young men and women involved. It is an excellent opportunity for young people to learn something challenging and keeps them busy and out of trouble. He hears good things about the committee now and about the progress going on.

**Bett Schaffhauser** asked people to share what they thought the greatest success has been on the committee, what they would like to see replicated or how to change it to improve it, what vision they have for the future, and how to talk to the new EEO director about how they should think about this committee.

**Ava Vent** said that she is thankful for the passage of the Traditional Tribal Chiefs Day resolution. She said during the TCC educational summit she heard that we do still need Alaska Native teachers. So one thing she would like to see is more Alaska Native teachers hired in the district. Maybe this committee could play more of a role, like perhaps recommending teachers. Her office has a list of Native teachers in the region.

**Bett Schaffhauser** explained that the Workforce Diversity Action Plan is about looking at the district's current processes of hiring, training, retaining and recruiting to see what can be

done to increase the diversity of teachers in the district. The plan has seven goals and within each goal there are action plans with strategies, plans for evaluation and a scheduled timeline. They plan to pull community members into the internal committees to give feedback and to look at the current processes and see what might be missing and how they might be improved to meet the goals.

**Carol Lee Gho** was the board president of Fairbanks Native Association back in 1985-86. One of their biggest concerns was not having representation; she was one of seven Alaska Native teachers in the district. The meditation agreement was developed and one of the points was how to get more Native Alaska teachers. They established a program where teachers' aides would get release time from their jobs and tuition waivers so they could go to the University and become teachers. Within a few years they had seven graduates of that program; those teachers have now begun to retire. It was called Urban Exceed and was very successful. That might be something the committee could look into. Ms. Gho said that she would be happy to help if they needed information or guidance.

**Kelly Egger** recalled when Ellis Ott gave a presentation on student discipline the meaning of the numbers in the report was not clear. The committee requested clarification and Mr. Ott came back with more transparent information and they learned that black males were more likely to get disciplined than white males. Mr. Egger is concerned that students of color are being treated differently for disciplinary actions in the schools. Bett Schaffhauser clarified that Mr. Egger would like to see this committee address this issue as one of their goals.

**Georgia Sandgren** shared a success story from the committee when they took on the military student identifier. It is now on the student enrollment form and parents can self-identify then it became law in Alaska. Ms. Sandgren shared that at a Board meeting she heard the head teacher from Effie Kokrine talk about needing help dealing with mental health issues. She stated she imagined it was an issue for teachers at other schools as well and she would like the committee to take a look at that issue. She also said she would like to look at the diversity makeup at charter schools in the district.

**Ava Vent** stated that many Alaska Native students are not identified with SPED. She was recently in a meeting with people from rural schools and the rehabilitation program director at TCC, Amanda Rey. Ms. Rey shared information that when students have an IEP and are going to graduate that a transition needs to be made to TCC because they will still need plans after they graduate. Ms. Vent would like to see this committee set a goal to see that the transition is being made for those students.

**Bett Schaffhauser** shared that one of the greatest and impactful successes of this committee was making Martin Luther King Day a holiday for the district. It had tremendous impact; it took a long time to come but when it happened it happened with ease. Kelly Egger remembered that it was a non-school day already for students but then it became a day off for all staff. It was an important day for the students and became an important day for everybody in the school district. Ms. Schaffhauser stated it took a lot because of the financial impact on the district and that it was passed was a very telling point.

**Carol Lee Gho** asked if there were any people of color on the administration staff of the district. Bett Schaffhauser named Sandy Kowalski, Assistant Superintendent for Elementary schools and Traci Gatewood, Executive Director of Human Resources. Ms. Gho asked about Yatibaey Evans and Bett explained the management team is made up of directors and Ms. Evans position is a coordinator. Ms. Gho suggested they make an exception and include Yatibaey Evans since she represents such a big program.

**Alex Amegashie** would like us take this committee to the school level to educate students how to talk to each other. He spoke about the guest student they had from Lathrop who was on a diversity committee and the high school level. Mr. Amegashie would like to see students themselves educate each other about what is acceptable way to talk about their ethnicity. He would like to have diversity committees or clubs at each high school where they get together regularly so the students learn how to talk to each other. Use role playing so they learn what to say and do in certain situations.

**Carol Lee Gho** asked if the committee still had a brochure stating the missions and goals and if it was distributed to the schools; that it was important to get the brochures out to the schools.

**Helena Schreder** remembered that they did student focus groups at schools one year. They went out to the schools and got kids to participate; they used food as a motivator. Once the students got going they asked them questions. Like having a Board Ethnic Committee of youth across the schools, integrated from different schools like once a month.

**Kelly Egger** stated he is still concerned that we have a number of people in our schools who just don't get it. He experiences it on a regular basis with teachers and principals. Doesn't know how this committee can drive the Board to make it a priority to see that every teacher and staff get training.

**Helena Schreder** said that it's a matter of finding the person in the school that buys into the purpose of the Board Ethnic Committee. Go out to the school where your kids go and find the person who's going to buy into the committee and encourage the students to get involved.

**Carol Lee Gho** remember when the district was using the Challenge Day program. There was a discussion of how the program worked, the issues brought up and how powerful the program was. There were also follow up groups that the students started to keep the momentum going. This was a great investment the district made.

**Tanya Mendelowitz** came to committee because after doing Race and Healing class she became very bold. She finds that adults get scared talking about these issues. We need to give kids the bravery to ask questions that make adults uncomfortable. We all have to be reminded constantly, to be the very best person we can be every moment.

**Ana Richards** told about growing up in Panama, brought up without a mother. Her father taught her we are products of our environment. We all come with bias. When she first came here she was very judgmental of other until she learned empathy and that she wasn't so different from the others. We talk about having people of color in positions of power, we are concentrated on numbers. But we have to look into how much do we know so we can make a difference. Sometimes we are in those positions and we don't know much and we can be our own worst enemies.

**Alex Amegashie** this committee is trying to put something together to be able to do things instead of just talking.

**Kelly Egger** said if we have the right structure in the schools we will learn from the children. And then they will spread it in the schools and they will take control of that environment if we allow it. We know that teenagers will change the culture and environment wherever they are. How do we provide a safe place for that to happen?

**Cynthia Henry** said she was glad to see the committee is still so vibrant. She challenged committee members to be sure that the person who takes over Ms. Schaffhauser's job sees this as a priority. It needs the support of the district administration and the Board to see that it continues and thrives.

**Alex Amegashie** asked about the item under New Business on the agenda, i.e. the interview committee for the new EEO director. Bett Schaffhauser explained that Human Resources is asking for a representative from this committee for the EEO director interview committee. Interviews will be scheduled for early in June, there are five people to be interviewed. She asked if anyone wanted to volunteer. Alex Amegashie put his name in the hat.

**Bett Schaffhauser** said the other New Business item is the annual report. Draft copies were passed out and she asked for a volunteer to read the report to the Board at the June 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting. Ava Vent volunteered to read the report.

The next meeting of the committee will be September 10, 2015.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.