

Draft Minutes

Meeting Place: Agency of Education
Address: 219 North Main Street, Suite 304
Date: May 23, 2016

Present: Ken Page; Mike Dreiblatt; Bor Yang; Karen Richards; Henri Sparks; Jeff Fannon; Kathy Johnson; Curtiss Reed (via phone); Dana Kaplan; Lucie Garand; Rebecca Holcombe
AOE: Suzanne Sprague
Visitors: Lisa Bedinger

Agenda:

1. H. 95 - [online here](#)
2. Proposal from Karen Richards and Jeff Francis regarding Restorative Justice
3. Burlington School District's Move to Restorative Justice – Henri Sparks and Burlington Community Justice Centers
4. Recommendations/statement on AOE's discipline report for follow up work to reduce incidents of exclusion as well as disproportionality
5. Updates from council members on individual work
6. Other?

The meeting convened at 2:37 P.M.

Page convened the meeting and passed around a list of rules for the meeting that he wanted followed. He requested that the members add a rule if it was missed. Secretary Holcombe spoke briefly on H.95 which refers to the AOE and restorative justice and similar practices. The Agency will consider the research that demonstrates restorative approaches. The plan is to reduce absenteeism, suspensions and expulsions. ESSA is a reauthorization of the NCLB to improve school climate. There is no new money.

Item #2 was removed from the agenda.

Sparks began discussion of agenda item # 3 by sharing that he would like the Burlington School District (BSD) to become a restorative school district. Historically, BSD has been in the news for unfavorable reasons such as the achievement gap, students of color and other reasons. These are all reasons why the school district would want to make changes. BSD had a suspension rate that was greater for students of color and for students with disabilities. A reason may be that the

teacher does not know the student is on an IEP or does not know how to handle that particular student/situation.

Sparks continued that BSD plans to become a Restorative Practice School and build a restorative foundation. He removed justice from the terms so it wouldn't be confused with criminal justice. With the help the South Burlington City Community Justice Center (SBCJC), the high school has been participating in a pilot program to help understand data and how it impacts student learning. The plan involves community members.

Sparks added this does not mean that the students are not held accountable. BSD needs to set up an out of school location so the students can still be provided education with an additional goal to provide full wrap-around service. PBIS is the 2nd step. The goal is to create a foundation that will not replace or interfere with other support services.

Sparks visited other schools in Vermont and New Hampshire that are restorative campuses. The achievement rate is up, student involvement is up and teacher morale is high. The school climate feels different and everyone is engaged. Sparks said another goal at the BSD is to eliminate violence and fights.

Lisa Bedinger of the SBCJC added that this is a district-wide change process. The Criminal Justice Center (CJC) will provide technical assistance and training. UVM is helping with the information and managing the data. There is a 10 page pilot development plan. Looking at the schools with this already in place, the schools are practicing student led circles for relationship building. Overtime, the school developed deeper engagement in the community/relationship piece. Alternative programs like ONTOP and Horizons will be located at the high school.

Sparks added that this all costs money and in order to move forward with fidelity, everyone must be trained with the basic knowledge. The hope is to create a finance committee to raise money to fund the resources needed to implement. A small part of the BSD school budget is allocated for this purpose. The plan is to create working relationships with the City of Burlington to work in conjunction with the courts, etc. and figure out how to deal with the relationships with courts. Sparks continued that if Burlington was a Restorative City, what would that look like and how do we best support the students? Sparks hopes this would close the achievement gap, students of color would have less arrests, there would be an increase in student accountability, suspensions would be eliminated and there would be inclusion of new Americans. Sparks said that we can no longer say black students. We should be saying African American students, New American students, and so on.

Page asked if there is a mandate to investigate. He is encouraged with the effort that BSD is making. Page wondered if there was any thought to develop a catalogue of who is seriously considering this restorative work across the state. Johnson added that Vergennes is involved.

Fannin said that training for everyone is important. Reed said to frame the proposal in a way that shows this will not happen overnight. Sparks replied this is a 5-year plan with objectives and goals for each year and a way to grade how things are progressing.

Dreiblatt added there is a lack of specificity regarding funding and there is concern as funding dries up and time goes on - how will this continue? Sparks said the superintendent incorporated a budget line item. He added that we need to look at this as a community initiative then they will more than likely have the money. Secretary Holcombe recognized the shift in priorities in the BSD system. She also acknowledged that there will never be enough money.

Page asked to move to agenda item #4. He appreciates all the work that the AOE put into the discipline report. Secretary Holcombe said there are challenges in pulling data and that we must be mindful of privacy. The Agency can probably generate data reports for most SUs. The Agency would not generate a report to compare an SU like Winooski that has a high proportion of students of color with an SU that has 5 kids of color. Richards added they would have to be comparable districts.

Page moved to Agenda #5.

Page said that Kaplan has been very busy. Kaplan agreed that the bathroom update has been keeping him very busy. Secretary Holcombe added that the student walkout at Green Mountain High School speaks volumes. Johnson mentioned that Bellows Free Academy in St. Albans is holding a World of Difference Program on race and racism in Montpelier which will be student led.

Adjourn:

Page moved to adjourn the meeting at 3:50 PM.