

Citizen Advisory Committee Meeting
November 23, 2020
6:00 p.m.

1) Call to Order and Approval of Minutes.

Meeting was called to order at approximately 6 pm. Minutes from the Oct. 26, 2020 meeting were approved.

2) Anti-Racism Policy and Equity Initiatives Discussion

Mr. Sandy Walker, Supervisor of Equity & School Improvement gave a presentation on the anti-racism policy and equity initiatives at CCPS (see attached slides).

Background.

Dr. Walker stated that in approximately 2015, the CCPS Board of Education began investigating equity and bringing equity into the system. The No Child Left Behind Act had some problems, but a positive was that the law required school districts to pull data apart. Some schools saw great overall test scores but discrepancies between student groups, such as minorities, ELL, special services, other groups.

The equity policy and Dr. Walker's position came into being. Equity is defined as meeting the needs of all students/student groups and providing whatever each student needs to be successful. CCPS began to work with African American students who were not moving forward as CCPS would have liked. CCPS began to look at the system and specifically at implicit bias and racism.

Equity Quiz.

Dr. Walker walked the CAC through the questions in the equity quiz (in the attached slides) and asked CAC members to think in advance of the answer. When the answer was presented, Dr. Walker asked CAC members to think about why they chose the answer they did.

Conclusions.

Dr. Walker stated his conclusions that racism is so ingrained that we don't see it (like a fish in water). Dr. Walker indicated that being anti-racist, is not just saying, "I'm not racist." We must identify issues and move forward.

CAC Member Observations.

CAC members offered observations and suggestions after the presentation, and Dr. Walker responded.

Suggestion: Measures should produce sustained racial equality between racial groups. We need more than a guideline and need to review the policy every year. We need to set goals and then check to see if we have obtained them.

Response: Dr. Walker responded that we need to ask questions. What are we completing? What are we putting staff through? What are we dismantling to move forward? We need to get input from staff, students, and the community. We need to ask students and others to tell about their experiences. Sometimes it's not just a number, but steps like that that can move us forward.

Suggestion: A CAC member stated that she had worked as a substitute and experienced reverse discrimination. She was trying to help and work with a student. The student responded that because the teacher was white, she didn't understand. The CAC member asked how to address a student who says "I owe him" just because I'm white and the student is not, and how to get that idea out of the school system too? The CAC member remembered when schools were segregated, but now everyone is getting the same lecture and the same teacher. The CAC member asked how to instill in students that the teacher is here to teach you, and your job is to listen and learn?

Response: Dr. Walker responded that if someone says, "You don't know my experience because you are white", they are right. At the core of this work is a sense of humility, humility in saying, "You're right." "What should I know?" That starts a shift. If a student is white, s/he sees students who look like him/her, have similar experiences, and are in important positions. The curriculum should also address black students, what they look like and their experiences. If it doesn't, that's a disadvantage. Why would students care or want to engage in curriculum that doesn't speak to them or have them in mind? Dr. Walker recalled a parent who communicated to him that the parent was glad the student had a black teacher, so the student knew she could be who whoever she wanted to be.

Suggestion: CAC member suggested some other resources for achieving equity in schools, such as "Courageous Conversation", and stated the importance of continuing this conversation.

Suggestion: CAC member asked what exactly the policy meant? What specifically are we going to do? What tactically will be happening? As a parent, the CAC member had concerns about age-appropriateness. If issues are not handled at the right time, that can have the opposite result.

Response: Dr. Walker responded that implementation starts with looking at the purpose of the policy and acknowledging personal and institutional racism. Mr. Walker indicated that this is a huge "do" because it is diving into something that people don't want to be a part of or accept. We need to look at the system – what experiences do people need to go through and what do they need to learn? All CCPS teachers/staff have gone through "Stamped" and CCPS leadership are looking at creating anti-racist action plans. We all need to think, "What am I doing to battle implicit bias, racism?" CCPS needs to look at the identification process for gifted and talented and special education services. We need to look at and tweak those processes because gifted is across the board – anyone in any group can be gifted – and students in any group may need to be provided services.

Dr. Walker also indicated that we needed to look at the entire hiring process and that there was a shortage of teachers of color. We need to ask what we can change structurally to make it more enticing to bring qualified teachers of color into our area. We also need to look at AP and honors students. What's missing in the identification process and how do we create access for students

we are missing? All departments need to have a hand in this. The meat will be in the procedures that will be created. Policy gives the backbone – it's in a policy and so has to be done.

Dr. Walker also referenced Jennifer Harvey's book "Raising White Kids". The book provides age appropriate ways to talk about race. Pre-K or K talk about how people are different, about different hair and dress, and about how everyone belongs.

Suggestion: How is CCPS addressing discipline issues?

Response: Student services can help students acknowledge harm that they may have done. There is an open communication piece. What are conversations we can have, other ways to address discipline issue other than suspension. We need to move forward in positive way and keep kids in school because suspension doesn't work.

Suggestion: Can the CAC committee provide additional input to policy and provide input to staff writing the procedures? And should this be done as a group, rather than individually? The CAC should try to come to agreement on issues to be considered for the procedures. The CAC could submit info to Karen and then come to meeting, consider and vote on those issues.

Response: The CAC should look at procedures and think about "for this to happen, school system needs to do x, y and z."

Response: Karen Maxey responded that process-wise, the policy is up for approval. It was brought to Board in October, then Board provided final revisions on November 12. The public gets 30 days to review. The Board then votes whether to approve the policy, and if the policy is approved, procedures are developed. CCPS staff is tasked to write a procedure. Procedures do not have to be approved by the Board before implementation.

Suggestion: CAC member suggested that we need to see more meat on the procedures, and accountability. We need concrete goals and measurements and should review annually rather than every 3 years.

3) Update on Hybrid and Plans to Move Forward

Ms. Workman provided the hybrid update.

The Board voted at its last meeting not to move forward with the hybrid plan for grades 3-5. The Board also voted to pause the current hybrid plan for pre-K to 2 because of an increase in cases.

CCPS had 2 weeks of hybrid instruction. By all accounts it was very successful. The teachers were excited and energized by the students. The youngest learners were all smiles. CCPS received parent emails about how being back in school changed their child's outlook. But because of the Covid-19 numbers, CCPS pulled back. CCPS is continuing to plan to go back to the hybrid model as soon as we are allowed to, and also to bring back grades 3-5. When CCPS gets the go ahead, CCPS wants to move forward with pre-K through 5 and perhaps even some

middle school. They also want to have some special groups in, and move ELL learners in as soon as possibly can.

CAC members responded to Dr. Workman's presentation, and Dr. Workman provided responses.

Observation: A CAC member noted that the County Health Department did not provide a metric. The CAC member appreciated that the Board has that in mind. The CAC member brought up the 5% positivity rate and 15 cases per 100,000 and asked what metrics are guiding the decision about when things would reopen and when 3-5 might happen?

Response: A defined metric doesn't yet exist. Dr. Polsky still said was safe to be in school. But no defined metric. Hoping end first semester begin to bring students back in.

Observation: A CAC member indicated that there were a lot of questions and feedback trying to understand what was driving the Board's decision, and that it doesn't seem to be metrics. The CAC member indicated that the CDC says safest place is in schools, same with U.S. Department of Education, and the County Health Department also agreed. The CAC member asked what is driving change in decision because doesn't seem to be consistent. That is difficult for working parents. Understanding helps people process information better, and parents didn't get a good explanation of how decision was made.

Response. Board Member Balinski responded that she is a metric person and is watching the encroaching disease, which has surpassed her comfort level. Ms. Balinski referenced the 5% positivity rate and 15 case per 100,000 people. In Ms. Balinski's view, schools are safe when we don't have community spread around us because the virus will inevitably come into the buildings. Ms. Balinski indicated that there is a certain point when it would be safe to return, when we have sustained levels of low community spread. But the holidays coming up, and there is an explosion of the disease around us. Ms. Balinski stated that when we get past Thanksgiving, and the numbers around us start to reduce, if there is a week of that, she would be for trying to get people back into the schools. She is worried about undetected spreading and that going back and then closing again would be disruptive to parents' schedules. The ripple effect of quarantine gets complicated for staffing levels and other things, and these are hard decisions.

Other Board members present were asked if they would like to make a statement, and no other Board members responded.

Observation: A CAC member asked what the endgame was. The member indicated that Covid-19 is not going away, and at least at first, health officials are not going to utilize the vaccine for children. Using the 15 per 100,000 may mean that kids never get back to school, and it could be years. We don't need large percentage, don't need 90%, but it takes time to get vaccine administered. We don't have the answer here – pose question to think about. Can't continue to keep children out of school because of fear. Kids are not thriving. Need to learn skills now as a foundation for their education. Putting tremendous strain on parents, children, teachers. Mental health issues. Virtual learning is horrible on families, relationships, mental health.

Response: We have heard that, need to be cognizant of it.

Observation: A CAC member asked how the virtual school situation has impacted the budget/taxes? When parents pulled kids for homeschooling, there was a loss of revenue. What are the budgetary impacts?

Response: Schools are asking the State to be held harmless regarding funding as a result of students withdrawing from school. Schools still need to buy PPE and have new technology costs. CCPS has received some grants through CARES funding, for extra tutoring, etc. But CCPS is waiting to see where everything falls out.

Observation: A CAC member indicated that there was a definite difference in virtual learning between Calvert County and Charles County, and that Calvert is much better. Teachers have been phenomenal and are making sure that virtual learning is working well.

4) Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:30 pm.