



Equity Advisory Council

6 p.m., April 1, 2021

Zoom

Members: EAC Chair Pha Chia Moua, EAC Vice Chair Calvin Keasling, Kira Adenwala, Alyssa Bartosh, Leigh Collier, Jacob Dereje, Luis Fernando Salguero, Michael Gillis, Tian Grace, Carita Green, Grantham Green, Kathryn Haave, Emma Huppert, Cathy Kindem, Lee Mbiyu, Becky Melville, Sahasra Molleti, Lauren Nelson, Shaun Pannu, Veronica Ramos, Kate Schmidt, Scott Tryggeseth, Jorja Valandra, Julie Wavrunek and Carol Wekesser; ex-officio School Board members Sachin Isaacs, Cory Johnson and Jackie Magnuson; Superintendent Mary Kreger; Director of Equity and Inclusion Virgil Jones; Director of Secondary Education Michael Bolsoni, Communications Supervisor Emily Buss and Executive Assistant of the Superintendent and School Board members Caley Longendyke. Guest speakers Bo Thao-Urabe.

UPDATES

EAC Chair Pha Chia Moua welcomed the group and recognized the difficult times some may be experiencing during the Derek Chauvin trials. She read the poem "The Hill We Climb," by National Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman. Superintendent Mary Kreger thanked Moua and EAC Vice Chair Calvin Keasling for their leadership with the council. She provided district updates and said the administration will recommend to the School Board on April 12 to transition secondary students to in-person learning on April 20. She said there is a district planning team working with a sense of urgency to develop summer programming that will offer a range of services. One factor that could likely be an obstacle is staffing. Summer programming is scheduled towards the end of the summer as a way to transition students back to school. Kreger talked about the communications the district sent to local legislators about releasing federal relief funds for school during the current school year. The funds were released and there was indication that the outreach from the community helped with this action. Kreger said there are areas of the country that are trying to enact restrictions on resources for those identifying as transgender. She explained that students are protected under Title IX, but the district will be reviewing policies and regulations to ensure students who identify as transgender are protected.

Director of Equity and Inclusion Virgil Jones provided updates. The coordinator position for the Equity and Inclusion department is posted and has received 20 candidate applications thus far. The posting closes April 9. Jones asked council members to share the job description with anyone who may be interested and who may qualify for the position. He said the Curriculum and Instruction Advisory Council has open positions for those who are interested. Jones said the district will be going under an equity audit in the near future and asked a member of the council to join a planning meeting with a company who will potentially provide the audit services. Moua acknowledged that the EAC is a new group and it is in a formative stage. She said the council will continue to form its priorities and its focus as it works to support the district's equity work. She thanked group members' patience as more actionable opportunities are presented.

Keasling provided a recap of what the council determined as definitions of equity, educational equity and anti-racism. They will be used as a resource for EAC members. Jones and Moua talked about the communications from the superintendent's office in regards to responding to significant current events occurring in or out of school that may have an impact on our families, staff and students. The latest example was responding to the targeted violence towards Asian Americans in Georgia.

Special guest Bo Thao-Urabe, executive director and founder of the Coalition of Asian American Leaders (CAAL), presented to the group. Thao-Urabe described the work of CAAL as a statewide organization that brings together leaders of ethnic groups to harness their power to best support the community. She talked about the BOBA program, or Becoming Organizers, Becoming Advocates, a youth leadership program that offers a safe space for Asian Minnesota youth to come together to determine how they can create positive change in the community. Thao-Urabe described CAAL's top three priorities as immigration, education and economics. She talked about the importance of data desegregation and policies ensuring quality education. She explained the negative implications the pandemic has had on the Asian community, including prejudice against Asian-owned businesses, prejudice against the AAPI population (i.e. being denied services) and physical assaults on the AAPI population. In response, the AAPI community has reached out to state officials to call for change. Thao-Urabe provided a historical overview of Asian American history and how the AAPI community were the first to be targeted as a racial group. How can schools create safe environments and acknowledge that Asian American students are potential targets of violence and intimidation? She said what happens in the school has a lifelong impact on children and that this is a learning opportunity for students to learn about the history and implications of the racism seen in the past and today. It is believed that hate and discrimination are underreported, due to the lack of charges and punishment for hate crimes. CAAL offers a helpline to report incidents and stories of discrimination, so the occurrences can be tracked and presented to state leaders to show what's happening in their communities.

EAC members worked in small groups for the remainder of the meeting and provided input on how the district can address anti-Asian racism for its students, staff and community members, and ways to support the AAPI community. The district will continue exploring opportunities where members of the EAC can offer their expertise.

NEXT MEETING

6 p.m., May 13, 2021

Zoom