

Special Equity Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, January 11

Members Present: Mariam Khan, David Asbery, Kevin Shea

Call to order: 6:09 PM

No additions to the agenda

Public Comment: Perjah Delgado

Equity Chair Statement on Public Comment and Accessibility

The Equity Chairperson affirmed the importance of public comment as one of the foundations of an ethical and democratic process enabling students, teachers, parents and guardians, and community members to reach the Board. However, many Board meetings follow a hybrid model and some subcommittees meet entirely on Zoom. While written public input is accepted, it must be turned in hours prior to the meeting and may present a burden to those who are engaged with the school or work day. Public comment should not be limited by attendance via Zoom, especially in cases where Zoom attendance is the only possible avenue of attendance. This is a matter of equity when considering the burdens associated with in-person attendance (childcare, illness, other commitments).

As such, the Equity Chairperson took to ensuring the Equity Committee meeting had features to allow those on Zoom to participate in public comment. This request was denied. The following concerns were shared: public participation is a long established tradition of the Board and the community deserves the same norms around public comment for in-person and Zoom attendance. This is not a broad, thematic discussion around public comment but ensuring this equity and pandemic-related concern reached a speedy resolution. Given the longitudinal and complex issues that approach, this equity concern must be immediately remedied.

Information Item: Update on School Food Options

The committee discussed the update on school food options in Hamden Public Schools. No Whitson's representative was publicly present at the meeting and a written message was provided instead. The updates included Halal-friendly options, meatless Mondays, and cultural cuisines.

Questions from Board members included topics such as holiday parties, outside food, halal food options, and notifications to families. Board member Asbery also asked about how families were being notified of the information being discussed. Superintendent Highsmith stated the administration team proactively meets with Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services (IRIS). He also shared that there are two potential halal

vendors through Whitson's. Board member Khan made a distinction between halal and halal-friendly foods. Superintendent Highsmith and Asst. Superintendent Bailey drew attention to USDA regulations and school district policy (such as Hamden Public School District Policy #6142.101 - Student Nutrition and Physical Activity: Student Wellness Policy) on the matter of outside food during school parties and celebrations. Given such policies, Board member Khan reiterated the need for food options that are inclusive and celebratory of students' dietary restrictions and cultural backgrounds.

Finally, discussions around holiday parties included promoting diversity and inclusion without limiting celebration.

Meeting Adjourned: 7:02 PM

Motion: Mariam Khan

Second: Kevin Shea