



## SCHOOL COMMITTEE (Official Minutes)

### Roundtable Meeting

November 27, 2018

Called for 6:00 p.m. in the CRLS Henrietta S. Attles Meeting Room, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, 459 Broadway, Cambridge, for the purpose of a presentation and a conversation with students (from both the BSU and Micro-aggression Working Group) to hear directly on 2018-19 school year, as well as to provide the CRLS community a forum to collaborate and update on relevant work being implemented.

Members Present: Ms. Bowman, Emily Dexter, Mr. Fantini, (ABSENT) Mr. Kimbrough, Ms. Kelly, Ms. Nolan, (ABSENT) Mayor McGovern

Also Present: Dr. Salim, Superintendent of Schools  
Dr. Carolyn Turk, Deputy Superintendent  
Ms. Barbara Allen, Executive Director of Human Resources  
Dr. Alexis Morgan, Asst. Supt. for Student Services  
Dr. Anda Adams, Asst. Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment  
Ms. Elizabeth Liss, Education Liaison for Mayor's Office  
Ms. Claire Spinner, Chief Financial Officer  
Ms. Maryann MacDonald, Asst. Superintendent of Elementary Education  
Ms. Chris Colbath-Hess, Professional Development  
Mr. Dan Monahan, CEA President

Mayor McGovern in the Chair

A quorum of the School Committee being present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.m.

The Chair gave a brief history of how this meeting came to be a reality, he made opening remarks regarding the thoughts and complaints of the seniors of the class of 2018, sharing that he feels bad the former students do not know how significant their initial move to come forward to shed light on the injustices they have suffered really is. Mayor McGovern made mention that former Mayor E. Denise Simmons and City Councilor Sumbul Siddiqui have joined this meeting tonight, then went on to explain that normally, as the Chair of the Committee of the Whole, he Chairs all meetings, however Ms. Bowman will Chair this particular meeting.

Mayor McGovern turned the meeting over to Ms. Bowman who gave opening remarks regarding tonight's presentation on Micro-aggressions. She asked the panel to introduce themselves.

Dr. Salim stated that he will share three slides which are the objectives for this evening and return to the rest of the PowerPoint later.

PowerPoint Presentation CRLS Black Student Union & District-wide Micro-aggressions Working Group Roundtable November 27, 2018

- Highlight the contributions and accomplishments the BSU achieved through their commitment to dialogue, education and empowering social events.
- Provide an overview of work, findings, and draft proposed recommendations of Micro-aggressions Working Group
- Share School District, CRLS and School Committee work on equity, access and cultural proficiency

### Agenda

- Overview
- Voices of Students: Black Student Union
- Micro-aggressions Working Group Overview
- Equity, Access and Cultural Proficiency:
  - Cambridge Public Schools, CRLS
  - Cambridge School Committee

- Discussion

#### Working Definitions of Equity and Racial Equity in CPSD

**Equity** means that each student, regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, gender identity, disability, sexual orientation, religion, or socioeconomic status will have access to the opportunities, resources and support they need to attain their full potential.

**Racial equity** means the absence of institutional and structural barriers experienced by people based on race or color, that impede access, opportunities and results.

Ms. Bowman asked to hear from Mr. Dua and the Black Student Union.

Mr. Dua, History teacher and Black Student Union advisor, began by thanking everyone for coming and thanking the School Committee for the Roundtable that is centered on the BSU. He stated that the students that played a huge role in his leaving Somerville Public School and coming to CPS have graduated and he hopes that what was started by those students will be carried on with our current students. He will try to be as quick and thorough as possible as he gives a timeline of past events. In July, 2017 an article came out explaining that race played a role in why teachers of color left this district and the students made it known that they want more teachers of color. Two months later in September, the seniors informed him that they wanted to revive the Black Student Union. 3 months later, December 20, 2017 the student minority reports volume 1 video was filmed and released. When it was shared on social media out of pride, there was backlash as something that was not authorized to be released to the public. Colleagues in the CRLS building were not happy and expressed themselves in a union meeting. Going into January, 2018, there was a faculty meeting about what was going on and it was recommended that educators reach out to black male students, at the same time the BSU released volume 2. The students showcased being silent because they caught so much grief for speaking out in volume 1. Students were confused and hurt about why a banner made by the BSU in March was torn down twice within a week. The students decided to cancel the Culture Night event. June 2018, an event took place winning a Guinness world record with the most stuffed animals to show the world of Cambridge that they are not only about being angry Black people; they can be cheerful and happy also. They released their final minority report, volume 3. During the summer, Putnam Ave, Arlington High, and Somerville High school formed their own BSU, inspired by CRLS BSU. He read a list of derogatory messages that span from July 2017 to last week that gave an overview of his time here in Cambridge. Mr. Dua stated that the current students did not experience the explicitness of what went on last year, so he does not expect the students to say anything.

The presentation resumed. Dr. Salim explained the next section will be the Micro-aggressions Working Group.

Dr. Turk gave a brief overview of the Micro-aggressions Working Group, she and Ms. Bowman made it known to the students present that they want to hear their voices tonight as well.

Dr. Turk stated that they are looking for ways to eradicate what these students have been going through and explained that they centered many conversations around the phrase "I notice, I wonder". She stated that at the end of it all, no matter how many different conversations were had and how many topics were discussed; the students repetitively stated the same two things: Talk to us! Treat us right!

A list was shared of ten desires from students that cannot be here tonight. Dr. Turk read a few items from the list to highlight them:

- Accountability for Everyone,
- Policies not being implemented, it is clear that we are not following what we say we have in place.
- The students want more male, Black and Teachers of Color in the schools, compassionate teachers, and suggested a trial hiring process.
- Increased transparency

Dr. Turk informed those assembled that some changes are going to happen. There will be a set of recommendations as a priority area and guidelines for reporting and being intentional about relationship building. There should be training at the beginning of every year for new teachers at orientation.

Dr. Salim informed everyone of the district level work that has been happening. He mentioned work done with Wheelock uAspire Institute and the Nellie Mae Grant. He explained that there are more examples of Equity, Access and Cultural Proficiency Work in CPS on the website.

Principal Smith spoke next stating that prior to the work with the BSU that Mr. Dua spoke of; in December there were already plans to face issues of relationships between all students. He believes that all students regardless of background should talk to and learn from one another. Principal Smith explained they are aligning with the English department at Bunker Hill Community College in a Dual enrollment program. He is also working with Dr. Amante and will continue to do so. On January 29<sup>th</sup> 2018, the BSU members facilitated a meeting and there were some strong moments in the meeting that they need to return to again. That meeting included students from the Project 10 East, Gay groups and other minority groups. The BSU presented volumes 1, 2 and 3 because of their experiences at the school. Principal Smith made it clear that never have they been a rogue group. He believes there needs to be more work around transparency. He admits being frustrated that he is not able to give satisfying information on what happens after the students bring up issues and do the true work of reporting. It is frustrating on both sides. He spoke a little bit about what can and what cannot be communicated legally.

Ms. Bowman went through the School Committee Racial Equity Work; going over the 11 motions have been passed since 2017. She thanked everyone for sitting through the presentation. She strongly emphasized that a lot of work has been done, and asked now what? What does it mean, what will we do with the work, how do we build allies around this work? The students are central to these conversations, which is why she would like to hear from the youth.

Ranam Zeroual stated that she knows we can talk, but that is all we do is talk and it is repetitive. She has been here at Rindge for three years and she has not seen any change. The working groups and the discussions have not brought about any change. The BSU was created because of racism against Black students and she heard good things coming from this group and wanted to know more.

Benjamin Attles is concerned about the lack of progress for hiring teachers of color because over the past three years he has constantly been hearing about the requirements that are needed to get better teachers. On his first day of school, he hears a racist comment from a teacher. He believes that the negative comments from teachers that do not believe in diversity should not be teaching here. As he was about to name a particular perpetrator, Ms. Bowman stated that names will not be allowed. He suggested that the teachers that are defensive and do not want to teach diverse students should find another school to teach in.

Jessica Paul, CRLS senior feels very fortunate to go to this school; she lives outside of Cambridge and is in the RSTA program. Her experience here in Cambridge is better than in her hometown however, students have to code switch to fit in. Students learn behaviors and repeat behaviors that are not genuine but are accepted, and it is sometimes hard to act the way teachers want them to. She stated that teachers and students of other backgrounds and races don't understand the Black culture which is why we are not allowed to be ourselves. Teachers and administration do not want to listen to Black students when they try to explain why they feel oppressed. When speaking about X blocks, she doesn't know how much student input goes into them, for example, the X block on microaggressions didn't make much sense to some students. They need to let students have more input in X blocks. There is a lot of lack of understanding.

Casey Torres, Senior, while comparing the north to the south stated there are plenty of people in the north that are racist and easily hide behind it because we are in the north, at least in the south they are open with racism. Black people in the north are accused of being over dramatic, too petty. He believes there are probably people in this room that are racist, how would you know if you don't know everyone in this room. He asked how does a culture banner get ripped down twice then the whole event got cancelled and there is no accountability? Talking only gets you so far. What is the purpose? He thanked Principal Smith for recognizing all of the good BSU and the Working Group have done. If a Black person complains from the heart, and the responsive conversation is that the complaint was said wrong, that is the wrong conversation. Kids' voice matters is easy to say, but nothing is done after it is said; "we are going to look into it". Back in the classroom, same teacher, same hate, nothing changes. How can the kids' voice mean everything when they cannot know anything after it is reported? He hates coming to school because he is afraid of being called the "N" word. Don't call it micro-aggressions, call it what it is – racism. When the kids do something wrong, everyone knows their names, why do the grown, mature

people get to have their names kept out of it. It makes him mad. If you were a teacher that was called out on the video, you should have come to the BSU and said something. NO teachers congratulated Mr. Dua, he got side eyed. Even from students. He has been dreaming about this meeting because it is so much deeper than BSU. All we are doing is telling you there is a problem. The words are not doing anything anymore. There is a lot of anger in the racist attacks of using a weapon (even if it is a pencil). There is a lot of intentional racist anger shown when there is destruction to BSU property.

Ms. Bowman stated this is not about her, the students or any other people, it is about the institutionalized system. We are always going to be fighting. It was born out of the Native American's land being taken from them. It was born out of the Black American experience of slavery. What do we do to change a system so that people coming behind us can live in a different system? What keeps us from perpetuating the system? Ms. Bowman agreed that yes, we are tired of talking, but we don't have a lot of choice. We have had certain incidents of educators that have been fired on the spot for words that have come out of their mouths. She stated the fact that it is easier to get rid of a sub than a tenured teacher. It is easier to have a conversation about racist behavior. This is how we begin to change systems. That is why having the conversations are important.

Mayor McGovern stated that it is hard to say there is a 5 or 10 year-plan to get things better. We have to do both, get rid of the current racist educators and change to a non-racist system. He is still uncomfortable with the knowledge that the past BSU graduates in the class of 2018 thought they had not done anything. He explained that the law will intervene in matters of disclosure at times and we cannot get around that. We have to keep at it, we can not decide to stop. He stated that we are all racist on different levels of the spectrum.

Mr. Dua stated that what is nagging at him is that everyone recognizes that racism exists here, there is no denial. Looking around the room right now; there are people in this room with power. When this meeting is over, a conversation happened. So what? The conversations have started and ended too many times since he got here. We have not moved past task A, what is next? If what is next is that we need to have another conversation and keep talking about talking. Why? He has learned from both colleagues and students. He still feels uncomfortable in this space. He is grown. If he feels that way, how should we expect a student to feel? He is fed up with victim blaming 101. The first video should have been a red flag for everyone. Where is the collective universal outcry from top to bottom? Even if only one student had stated they experienced racism, something should have been done. One of the biggest regrets he has had is seeing 30 black students graduate and looking into their faces and knowing they feel they did not do enough. He pleaded with the assembly to do something. The light is green. Just Go.

Ms. Bowman stated that things have been done. There are some reasons why the district has made decisions connected to racism. Policies have been made that dismantle racial oppression, we may not see it, but it is there. We have to figure out how to continue to have conversations about projects that do not meet the mark, change them and then create better policies. It cannot be fixed all in one fell swoop.

Vice Chair Kelly stated she appreciates Mr. Dua saying the light is green. She feels a deep commitment to see change.

Emily Dexter stated that it sounds like there is a lot of pressure on Mr. Dua and the BSU. She would like us to concentrate on the reporting process where they can DO something about expressing themselves when the schools let them down. She doesn't want them to think it is their responsibility to eliminate racism.

Mr. Kimbrough was a student here 20 years ago, these experiences are not new. The conversations and the structure of our work to get results on erasing racism needs to improve.

Ms. Bowman acknowledged former School Committee Member Mr. Richard Harding, Jr. as being in the audience.

Dr. Salim is very sorry that the students feel the way they do. He believes that although we don't have all of the pieces of the puzzle put together, and we are not moving as fast as they want, CPS truly trying to create idyllic learning environments. He wants to continue the conversations and continue to be partners in action.

Natasa Farah, senior, has a big issue with the terminology being used here. It is blatant racism. To call it micro-aggression is minimizing racism. The taxes parents of color pay go to pay teachers that feel comfortable calling Black students names. She openly expressed this normal as a brutal way to live.

Ms. Bowman fully acknowledged this conversation was hard and unkind, and some will walk out of this room and say it was useless. She stated that this district has earned the distrust, the pain and the harm. She also stated that there are specific things in the PowerPoint, specifically the reporting process, that will make sure that the students know there is some progress that is action and not words. She mentioned the system the President of the United States has us operating under. She lifted up Dr. King as her inspiration. Despite all of the work he did, and the continued racism, he inspired future generations. We do things wrong, we need to be pushed. We are working hard to dismantle this system.

Mayor McGovern stated that it will feel like here we go again with another conversation. Dr. Amante will be having serious conversations about racism in our community.

Casey asked the adults in the room if they would have had different responses if their children were children of color?

On a motion by Mayor McGovern, seconded by vice Chair Kelly, the meeting was adjourned At 8:15. p.m.

Attest:



Dosha Beard  
Executive Secretary  
to the School Committee

**Distributed Back-up Documents** (copy on file in the School Committee office):

- CRLS Black Student Union & District-wide Micro-aggressions Working Group PowerPoint presentation
- Examples of Equity, Access & Cultural Proficiency Work in CPS
- Dealing with Micro-aggressions, Harassment & Discrimination in School
- List of motions dedicated to ending racism
- Email from Mr. Hasson Rashid (on file in the School Committee office)