



Commission for Diversity & Inclusion

Culture and Arts Working Committee

ACTION LETTER

Monday, March 14, 2022

Call to Order 7:15 pm

Roll Call

Members Present

Chairperson Ben Martin
Commissioner Rachel Courtney (7:30 pm)
Commissioner Lorenzo Harrison
Commissioner Roger Williams

Staff

Lisa Azimi

Guests Present

Amy Krinke, LS R-7 K-12 Music Department Chair and Curriculum Specialist
Kathy Graves, LS R-7 Secondary Art Department Chair
William Palmer, LS North HS Theatre Director

3. Approval of the Agenda

A motion was made by Commissioner Williams, seconded by Commissioner Harrison, to approve the agenda. Approved by a 3-0 vote.

4. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

5. Approval of the February 7, 2022

A motion was made by Commissioner Williams, seconded by Commissioner Harrison, to approve the February 7, 2022 action letter. Approved by a 3-0 vote.

6. Interview guest panel from Arts programs in the schools

Committee members introduced themselves and guests from Arts programs did the same. Commissioner Martin shared the Diversity and Inclusion Vision statement with those present. The Committee wants to go beyond the diversity issue and go to a broad definition and approach.

Questions were posed to the guests and were discussed. Some of the questions included what percentage of students from underserved groups were a part of their programs, economic issues that present barriers for students to participate, as well as the percentage of minorities within the teaching staff.

The commissioners asked how they could help the teachers. It was suggested to help facilitate bringing in guest speakers and artists to demonstrate that people of all backgrounds can be and are involved in the arts.

One recommendation to the Commission was to encourage the school systems to actively recruit minority faculty and staff.

7. Consider the process for reporting and recording the business of this meeting

This item was tabled and will be on the agenda for the next meeting.

8. Plan for meeting date in April

Commissioner Martin will be out of town for when April meeting was originally scheduled. April 18 at 7:00 p.m. was agreed upon by the committee for the next meeting date.

9. Roundtable

There were no Roundtable discussions.

Thanks for another great meeting. Very productive discussion. Opportunity to work with this subcommittee. Rachel-same echo that. Excited for to look more deeply into educ/arts mixed.

Adjournment: 8:44 p.m.



Commission for Diversity & Inclusion

Culture and Arts Working Committee

Committee Report to the Commission

March 14, 2022

Committee Members

Ben Martin, Chair
Rachel Courtney, Member
Lorenzo Harrison, Member
Claudia Meyer, Member
Roger Williams, Member

(March 14, 2022 via Zoom at 7:15 p.m.)

Attendance at Committee Meeting

Ben Martin
Rachel Courtney
Roger Williams
Lorenzo Harrison

Guests

Amy Krinke, LS R-7 Music Coordinator
Kathy Graves, LS R-7 Secondary Art Coordinator
William Palmer, LS North HS Theatre Instructor

The meeting was called to order and the agenda and action letter approved.

Introductions of our committee members and guests were done before we began our discussions. Ben put the Commission's Vision Statement up on the screen and gave a brief background talk about the Commission. After that we got to the first question we had.

"In general, we have been saying the Arts are uniquely qualified to address Diversity and Inclusion issues. First, do you agree and then how do you see that playing out in your departments?"

Graves agreed and talked about how the Arts were an inclusive and safe place for most students. They also teach the student that there are many right answers to a problem which tends to break down resistance to open discussion and recognition of the valuable contributions of others.

Palmer agreed and discussed the inviting and open approach to involving every student. The theatre programs attempt to make each student realize they have abilities within themselves.

Krinke agreed with all that had been said before, but discussed specific strategies and tactics that she, and other members of the music faculty, are working on. Language has real power and so they are moving away from gender specific terminology—less men and women and more use of treble and bass voices. They continue to look for culturally rich texts while also being aware of inadvertent bias and music that sent the wrong messages to students and parents. She related the story of a teacher who had chosen “Pick a bale of Cotton” as part of a presentation and the controversy that arose.

All three agreed that there are tremendous mental health issues to deal with because of COVID and the heightened sensitivity to cultural issues now. Underlying tensions exist in the classroom that make a teacher’s job more difficult.

Commissioner Williams asked about percentages of students from underserved groups who were part of the programs. Palmer was able to give a pretty detailed breakdown which was considered pretty representative in the other programs as well. All three noted that ethnic minority participation became less and less as one looked at more advanced classes. Percentages of students who expressed nonbinary sexual orientation and gender behaviors remained high throughout the programs, probably due to the greater acceptance demonstrated by teachers and students.

When asked about the causes of the diminishing numbers of minority students, Krinke especially noted the current emphasis on career preparation. Many parents are pushing their children to choose classes that directly prepare them for certain careers. Because of the perception that the Arts don’t hold career opportunities, students are steered away from those courses.

Commissioner Williams asked about the percentages of minorities within the teaching staff. The guests all related that the staff remained overwhelmingly white and female dominated. Music has 2 black staff members, art and theatre have none. The one exception is in theatre which is split evenly with 3 male high school teachers and 3 female middle school teachers. They also noted that when openings appear they have rarely been able to find minority candidates among the pool of potential teachers.

Martin asked about teacher comfort or concerns about teaching certain subjects or ideas that relate to diversity and inclusion issues. All 3 guests acknowledged that is an issue. There is a sense of having to look over their shoulders anticipating who might object to certain materials for a variety of reasons.

Concern was expressed about the ability to produce theatrical pieces that required ethnic specific roles. Partly because not enough students of color were participating, but also at times the reluctance of those students to be limited in the parts they could audition for themselves.

Commissioner Courtney also asked about economic issues that present barriers for students to participate. Krinke specifically talked about the inability of students with economic challenges to be able to afford private lessons, which are often important in developing advanced musical skills. She referenced a Liberty school district program that has devoted a significant amount of money to help deserving students pay for those lessons. She would like to implement that here.

The commissioners asked how could our Commission help the teachers. There was a concern about access. How can the teachers in these programs bring in guest speakers and artists to demonstrate that people of all backgrounds can be and are involved in the Arts. The teachers also noted that just knowing there is support is helpful as they address issues of diversity and inclusion.

Recommendations to the Commission, based on the conversations—

- 1. Many of the issues are outside the ability of the Commission to empower change.**
- 2. The commission can encourage the school systems to actively recruit minority faculty and staff.**
- 3. We continue to feel that the arts and arts education may be one of the most effective ways to bridge the gaps between divergent views in the community.**

Commission actions needed

None noted at this time, but there may be some recommendations that will be a part of the final report.

Respectfully submitted,

Ben Martin, Chair
Culture and Arts Subcommittee