

Minutes
Race Equity Advisory Committee
Regular Meeting
February 17, 2022

CALL TO ORDER

Present: REAC members Deanna Martinez, Eric Stahl, Peggi Erickson, Renni Bispham, Savanna Rovelstad, James Friday, Sue Wilmot. Liaisons: Brenda Fantroy-Johnson, Clarence Moriwaki.

Excused Jing Fong

AGENDA approved as written

MINUTES approval deferred until Mar 3 REAC meeting.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST no conflict of interest submitted.

PUBLIC COMMENT none

ISLAND PARENTS CONCERNED ABOUT OPPOSITION TO BISD DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR EQUITY, ANTI-RACISM, INCLUSION, DIVERSITY AND JUSTICE

Presented by Janna Cawrse Esarey, Laura Van Dyke and Adrian Malatesta

Laura Van Dyke: We are parents that value the work of REAC and BISD is doing to support equity on Bainbridge Island and in our schools. BI has a history of teaching historical truth and celebrating allyship with its curriculum of Indigenous, Indipino peoples and WWII internment of Japanese Americans. In August 2020 BISD school board adopted its current District Improvement Plan after significant outreach to and participation by staff, parents, students and community members this document helps shape district goals and priorities one section of the district Improvement Plan is entitled equity anti-racism inclusion diversity and justice.

We see the education of our children as community and civic priority. We see REAC vision statement that envisions a society where all systems, including education are just, fair and inclusive, as also supporting the dips equity section. Since part of your charter as REAC is to provide Informed recommendations to the City Council to address and rectify equity issues we're here tonight to share some challenges to our island schools' efforts to address racial equity.

Janna Cawrse Esarey: My name is Jana Cawrse Esarey. I'm a local writer on the island and a school bus driver with BISD, but tonight I speak to you as the mother of two students in the Bainbridge Island schools. Our intent is not to diminish any particular person or group tonight, but to simply describe the words, behaviors and actions that we have observed are opposing our schools work to become more equitable inclusive and just.

I'm going to give you a basic overview of the pushback we've seen. As Laura described, the District Improvement Plan was passed with overwhelming support in August 2020. In March of 2021 a national group called Parents Defending Education filed a Freedom of Information Act request of Bainbridge Island School District regarding a broad range of topics, including diversity, inclusion, equity and anti-racism. I went ahead and did a public records request of their (PDE) public records request, and I learned that our district is sending PDE 200 pages a month in materials. In order to fulfill this request, our district will be sending 200 pages a month to this national organization for the next 14 years.

I know that we have a sense that this is happening across the country, but we want to believe that it's not an issue here on Bainbridge Island. However, one local women's group is calling critical race theory a "quasi-Marxist ideology" and defined CRT, there in blue it says "it usually comes dressed up as equity, anti-racist or culturally responsive initiatives".

So that's from a local women's group on the island and that's just a screenshot of their website. A Freedom of Education Act was filed in March of 2021. This past fall a local parents group started speaking up at the school board meetings and this group. You can see the screenshot of their website. It is interesting, you may recognize this photo from this photo of the National Group that I mentioned earlier.

So, you can see we've got national influence with house bill 1807. State influence and local groups on the island pushing back against our school districts efforts. Last month, there was a letter to the editor in the *Bainbridge Island Review* that questioned two books that discuss racism. One is called *Not My Idea*, a book about whiteness by Anastasia Higginbotham. This is a book that is not in the Wilkes elementary school library, but it is not part of the curriculum. It's there as a resource for parents. And then, this letter to the editor from last month also offered a blanket criticism of Ibram X. Kendi, and quoted from another one of his books, but here on the screen I've got a picture of the book for young readers that is going to be part of the Woodward curriculum.

I wanted to let you know that we're seeing this national, state, local and individual push back against the school's efforts to become more equitable, inclusive and just, and I just think our community needs to know that this pushback is troubling, and this pushback is real.

Adrian Malatesta: Thank you. Hello, members of the committee, thank you for having us today hearing about these concerns. As stated, some of these will be restatements but important for you as we conclude on this want you to hear these thoughts. We're concerned citizens who support the work of REAC. We're here because we believe that our children's education is one of the core pillars of our island's community. Personally, I have three boys in elementary school and the island as well as many sports activities through recreation groups, as well as private businesses as you might imagine. We are a multi-racial family. My personal stake in this issue is that my sons are descendants of formerly enslaved Americans. Although they can learn about hundreds of years of history of their European ancestry, I am resolute in ensuring they also have the opportunity, and the right to learn about all of their history. We've been actively engaged with the school board to show support of the District Improvement Plan, or the DIP, as it is sometimes referred to. We share the REAC vision with you, to restate it verbatim that, envisions a society where all systems e.g., education criminal justice healthcare, housing, the economy, are just, fair and inclusive, enabling all people to participate and reach their full potential. We know that by having honest and courageous conversations about our history, people of all backgrounds have come to a deeper understanding of themselves, developed stronger connections with their neighbors, and have found purpose in doing their part to build a fairer and more inclusive world. We celebrate and honor the rich history of inclusivity and allyship on Bainbridge, ranging from our deep respect for Indigenous history, noted every time we say and acknowledge the land upon which we reside and live. The recognition of our Indipino heritage and the Japanese legacy, including the 80-year remembrance of the Japanese exclusion coming next month. We believe now is a vital time for REAC and the city council to express support for BISD District Improvement Plan and potentially create opportunities for community conversation.

In addition to our support of REAC, we want to offer some options to consider for this group, we do not merely seek to identify where issues exist, but to come as partners and solutions. And because the information highlighted for you tonight is so closely aligned to the REAC vision. We humbly request your consideration to raise this to the city council or make a statement and supporting teaching truth and supporting the equity, anti-racism, inclusion, diversity and justice pillar of the DIP. We have other ideas about how we can collaborate, but we mostly want to bring it to your attention, ultimately defer to the priorities of your committee and determine how best to move forward, we're happy to use the remaining time for questions or discussion as you see fit and very humbly like to say thank you for your time and consideration on this important matter to the island.

Discussion of presentation

Peggi Erickson: I just want to note that the REAC was a co signatory on a letter to the editor last August that we worked on with other organizations talking about this anti CRT movement.

I think it would be well worth our while as a REAC to be in alignment with our mission, to suggest to city council that they make, and we make, some kind of statement in terms of supporting not silencing or banning certain books. We know that talking about racism and white supremacy is uncomfortable. It's very necessary to acknowledge in order for racial healing to happen.

I would be very in favor of us creating a statement, and I think the Law and Policy group would be a great group to do it if they're willing to take it on. They could bring back to us and we could forward on to the Council.

Sue Wilmot: I wanted to also say that I think we should have an ongoing dialogue with the schools and even though we don't have jurisdiction, and they don't have jurisdiction over us, we need to have an ongoing dialogue over what's happening to keep each other aware. Maybe a quarterly meeting, maybe a subcommittee to meet with them, or something like that as well because. We don't we can't make rules for them, they can't make rules for us, but we can support each other and keep that going.

I just recently, like a couple weeks ago we started with the state Labor Council. We are going to do race equity training through Kitsap County, the CLC here. We're going to start a program of race equity training with them, and if you guys have connections with the teachers Union, let me know and we can get them involved as well.

Renni Bispham: I just want to make sure that we are clear that the schools are not teaching CRT. CRT is a label that those who oppose equity, diversity and inclusion have chosen to give it so that they can use it for their purposes, but the schools don't actually teach CRT. It's (CRT) a college course level information that is not taught at elementary middle and high schools, and so just want to make sure every time this conversation comes up, somebody should say "it's really not about CRT it's about teaching truth historical facts and presenting the experience of all groups, not just one group." I just want to make sure that we get those clear.

SUBCOMMITTEE PROGRESS

Law and Policy

- Submitted a recommendation for an auto referral of items to the City Council where they would refer to us automatically
- We received a response back from the city staff.
- The question was asked "what does this process look like if everything comes to us?".
- If we let everyone Council and city employees know what we would want to know about these projects, they could provide us with that information first, we can then make an assessment for the city.
- In order for REAC to make an advisory recommendation, a 6-question assessment would be used by city staff first.

Events and Outreach

- Hosting an in-person movie *Since I've Been Down at 11am*, Feb 27 at Bainbridge cinemas.
- There will also be a virtual showing of *Since I've Been Down* for those that are not available for in person event.

- We are having a march that morning at 10 o'clock.
- There will be a panel discussion after *Since I've Been Down* movie.
- Online registration will also gain access to podcast link of panel discussion.

Training and GARE

- Early-bird registration ends Feb 20 for GARE Conference 2022
- 3 members going in person, 2 members going virtually, 2 undecideds
- Mayor, Deputy Mayor and some city staff are also going to GARE Conference 2022
- City Council has asked REAC to advise on race equity training with and for the council within 60 days.
- If more time is needed

Strategic Plan: Nothing to report

Climate Change Equity Lens: Nothing to report

Finance: Nothing to report

RECOMMENDATION FOR CITY RACE EQUITY PLAN

Peggi: We could take this up at the next meeting, if you wanted to, but I can read the one that is current.

James: It might be a better decision to just put it on the agenda for the next meeting.

Peggi: I think we can adjust agree without a vote.

Savanna: Yeah, that's fine.

Peggi: It's in our notebook with comments in it. Please look at the link that Renni sent out I think it's much improved with Renni and Eric's changes so just read through it, and we'll pick it up at the next meeting, thank you very much.

Eric: I think it's worth doing right and deliberately it's possibly the most important thing we're going to do as a committee.

CITY COUNCIL MEETING REPORT

Brenda: We had a presentation on the Sustainable Transportation Plan and the different scenarios that they were proposing every Council Member had a chance to weigh in and talk about which scenario that they favored.

Clarence: I just wanted to report out that it's a strategic plan to try to get people out of vehicles and use other means of transportation. Walking, biking and rolling. We're still looking at three possible alternatives to create a network of safe trails that are available to all people, all ages. I think the majority of Council was supportive of a plan that ties our island centers together, Rolling Bay and Lynnwood Center to Winslow, so that way we can have people coming in and out and not having to use their vehicles.

Brenda: And it's all available on the city's website. I encourage everybody to look at it, because it's going to affect everybody on the island.

Eric: I was just going to complete the Council report, I was the designated watcher for the February 8 meeting and there's some news I think that's of interest to the Committee I'd like to report out. Our liaison proposal to tweak the liaison policy came up to the committee. A discussion over whether to have a future discussion, which the Council agreed to do by a five to one vote. There was a comment made

that our reason we wanted to change liaison policy was that we wanted our liaisons to be more proactive and take a more of an advocacy role. That struck me as not an accurate representation of what we're actually asking for, which is really a modest tweak to the existing policy. To remove an ambiguity that has in the past been interpreted to kind of stifle what our liaisons could say. My request liaisons, would be when it comes up for a substantive discussion, please refer to the actual language, and please do your best to represent it.

Peggi: I can't remember which committee put that (council monitoring sheet) together. I was wondering if they would go back and update it to remove Kamara's name and maybe move everybody else up until we get a new member.

FOLLOW-UP ON REAC ITEMS – STATUS OF CANDIDATES FOR POSITION 4

Renni: I think everyone saw I sent in essence a draft of a process that we could use to fill seats on this panel. Frankly, it could be used to fill seats on any other advisory committee. If you want to make comments, improvements, suggestions for improvements, edits etc. just go to the link. I'm happy to sit with the interview panel committee to answer any questions you might have about the process that I propose, but I think it's a way to have a fairly equitable review of all the applicants.

Ellen (she/her): We are working with the selection panel which is James, Savanna, Brenda and Clarence. We're waiting for everyone to be able to respond as to when they're available to have that meeting. Roz sent out a couple of emails asking folks to indicate their availability and when we get everyone to agree to a time that works for them, then we'll get that scheduled. She sent out the application, so people have those to review. I don't think I saw the email that you're referring to running but I'll take a look at that if you're willing to share and make sure that we can support, whatever process, the committee, the selection panel wants to use.

Savanna: The process that we have used again, it wasn't very set in stone, so it is good to have some structure to it Renni and I am going to look over what you sent over. I think it's a good idea to share it with Ellen as well, because if that is going to be integrated into the process then we might as well include her in that. Once I have read through all of it, I will have more comments on it.

GOOD OF THE ORDER

Renni: Everybody is human, and I think what we're experiencing tonight is simply human interaction. You can't script it. It doesn't go the way you want it to go every time. It's not perfect. If humans were perfect, we wouldn't need to exist, and so I just want to remind everybody that you know. This is not easy work. We are not immune to disagreements amongst ourselves, and I would hope that the public are anybody else watching this does not interpret this to mean that we are not resolute in our determination to make Bainbridge Island a more equitable place for everybody to live and so it's a bump in the road. We will get past it, and I think we'll be okay, and maybe even the better for it. Thank you everybody for your participation, and I hope you can just remember nobody's perfect. We all have stuff. We just need to do the best we can, and tomorrow will do better, but this doesn't mean that we're not resolute in our determination and with that I'd motion that we end this meeting right now.

Savanna: I second that.

ADJOURNMENT 8:00 pm.

Savanna Rovelstad

Savanna Rovelstad 3/3/2022