

August 27 Session 2 Meeting Report - Community Conversations Bozeman Public Schools

APPENDIX

LISTENING SESSION GENERAL PROCESS AND RATIONALE:

The following is a report which includes the words collected by the people who attended the session. Their words are identified in **COLOR**. There is an attempt to order the raw data in similar categories but is not intended to reflect the importance or priority of the information gathered.

This is the general process used during the listening sessions (community conversations). It includes a brief rationale for each activity. The process is often changed or adapted to fit the time available.

1. **Introduction by facilitator.** This allows the facilitator to get her/his voice in the room with an introduction, an overview of the project.
 - Listen to, and explore, diverse community views for providing equitable opportunities for students in the Bozeman School District.
 - Explore community concerns for developing an equity policy, including impacts on students.
 - Establish positive relationships between community members and Bozeman School District Board and Staff.
 - Develop a set of future outcomes for the students in Bozeman School District if the community works together.
 - Provide advice to School District Board and Staff for moving ahead in a way that will support students in Bozeman School District AND bring the community together.
 - Provide participants a learning experience, building capacity for listening with respect to others and building trust.

2. **Grounding:** This allows each person to get their voice in the room, equally. It establishes a Listening with Respect environment, where all speak in turn without interruption by others. It creates a sense of safety for the participants, and also provides some sense of the community concerns. Each person answers the three questions:

Introduce yourself and your relationship to Bozeman School District.

What are your expectations for this listening session (community conversations)?

How do you feel about being here?

When the participants pause, do not interrupt or try to help. Let them speak in their own time. Silence is OK for a while. They are thinking, overcoming self-consciousness. If you sense they need some time, ask if you can continue and come back to them. Then make sure you come back to them.

3. **Greeting Circle.** Meeting everyone. (May adapt to time depending on group size)

The facilitator moves inside the circle and greets the person to their left; then continue inside the circle, greeting each person in turn. Those who have been greeted follow the person who greeted them last inside the circle. When the facilitator returns to his or her original location, those inside the circle will continue to greet them, a second time. This time, the person inside the circle is the greeter, not the greeted. This balances the circle.

This allows the participants to meet each other as adults on a personal basis, to overcome the feeling of intimidation, to feel equal. It increases a sense of security, a sense of community.

4. **Learning from the experience.** (Optional) This activity allows all participants to learn from the experience. It helps them to get their voice in the room, knowing they will be listened to. It provides initial information on their concerns and how they feel.

How do you feel about the greeting circle?

What did you learn that will help us to listen and learn from each other?

5. **Listening to the Community:** Community members speak to a Board member or BSD staff or other community members/Students that have agreed to be there as a listener. This person is a listener who only responds with what they heard. It is imperative the listeners understand they are to respond only to what they heard and not how they feel about it. This puts the importance on the community member who speaks, and on their message.

Listening to community members will make them feel acknowledged and understood. It creates non-verbal cues in the listening adult that are comforting to the speakers. Continuing to listen to the community members/students will make them feel accepted. (Research supports this.)

“Community member... select a staff person/Board member to be your listener.”

Wait until they do. Then...answer these questions:

*What is your view on the equity work in the Bozeman School District?
How do you feel about it?*

The selected listener responds: *"This is what I heard."*

NOTE: A backup listener is also selected to help the listener. This person is usually the previous listener.

Often the participants will be shy and self-conscious about answering this question. They may pass, speak very softly, state they "don't know," or be silent. All are acceptable behaviors. They are still not certain they can trust the group. Be comfortable with how they act, allow them to be themselves, in the moment. This is an experience where they need to see if they can trust you, if you will accept them as they are.

If a participant passes, be sure to give them another chance when all have spoken.

AFTER ALL HAVE SPOKEN:

6. **Recording information:** This not only provides a record of the conversation, it also assures that people feel they are heard. The facilitator passes out 3 x 5 cards. Then the facilitator provides them this task:

*What views on equity work in the Bozeman School District did you hear others express? (On one side of the card.)
What views on equity work in the Bozeman School District did you express? (On the other side of the card.)*

State question one and wait until they finish recording before stating the second question. This allows the person to focus on each separately.

This not only gathers information, it also assures the participants that what they said has been heard. And... it is written in their own words.

OPTIONAL: If there is time, have each person read off the information from the cards. If not, gather the cards before moving on.

What We Heard and Shared: (NOTE: What District Listeners heard is identified in italics.)

Why did this even come about? People want to know our “why”. Why now - the community has endured so much already. Why are we talking about equity when teachers are doing such wonderful work? I don’t know where this policy originated and why the timing is now. Equity is a distraction for Bozeman. BSD7 equity work/policy/task force appears as a knee-jerk reaction without clarity of purpose. It just appeared and the language is written and here we are -- almost being dragged along to accept that some set equity is going to be enacted. There are 100 ways to do the right thing, but I don’t believe that BSD7 believes equity is the best way.

Many voiced support for all means all, and equity concept that gives kids (___) to meet their/individual highest potential. *Nobody can agree about this police. We all agree that ALL is important. All means all. All should mean all. All means all. We all want students to succeed. Everyone wanted kids to succeed. Focus on the gap is flawed as a focus on ALL students to achieve their best, is desired.*

The school district should push all students to be high achievers, while providing those students with identified needs with the resources necessary to achieve these high goals. Assess - Know our kids and take them forward. Don’t mess with family meals/values.

Words matter. Be very specific with policy language. It must be very clear and state exactly what is intended. *Equity means different things to people. Use specific language in the policy. Policy needs very tight language. We need to be explicit about what we need to try and prevent interpretations. This work is important but the mixed perceptions of “equity” word makes it tricky. If we want to narrow the achievement gap, explicitly state increase proficiency.*

I heard support and lack of support for equity work. I heard support and lack of support for diversity, equity and inclusion. A belief that equity is a good way to do things and I heard a belief that equity will harm our community. I heard support for closing the achievement gap and I heard that closing the achievement gap can be looked at from the top down or the bottom up.

Equity conversations needed in work and the larger community. The willingness of the district to address equity makes the person proud to be an american. Equity is a complex international problem and deserves to be a focus for the school. The issue is larger than Bozeman - very nuanced work. Equity is complex, nuanced and important. It is a pathway to a more just society and helps our kids learn to navigate an ever increasingly complex world. That we would/could choose to engage in a conversation like this is part of our privilege - a privilege not afforded to all in our community - many of whom the equity policy has an opportunity to serve. BSD7 is on the right track with this policy. Listening sessions should ___ this, clarify the shared noble goal.

The persistently high-achieving students in the district are not having challenging materials supplied to them. their needs are historically and presently overlooked. Shouldn’t take a box away from the tall person but should give the short person a box. (equity image).

Equity means everyone loses equally and loses all opportunity.

Equity may limit a student's potential. We are almost giving kids a pass to fail with the "inputs" to accommodate their challenges - that we are 10% where we come from and 90% how we react. BSD7s equity work/policy flips that. Self-motivation is the biggest determination of outcome/success. *Don't use barriers as an excuse for poor performance. Don't give kids excuses - attitude is important.* Equity focus is on 10% of inputs, rather than 90% response. Equity is a flawed concept. Focus on disadvantages is flawed.

History (racial) as was taught in a parent generation did not adequately discuss the role of slavery in regard to Jefferson. We should teach the deeper history of our country.

Equity work can be misused. Had an equity training hijacked. Equity training and equity work can be abominations. Equity initiatives rob qualified people of work. I heard a story of diversity training in the private sector gone wrong. A parent gave many examples of why equity has not worked (family, coaching, work) There are people who feel that their kids have not been served by the BS7 and that feels inequitable. A parent shared teachers caused a student to be estranged from the parent.

There are concerns that equity is a slippery slope to Marxism. Much of what we are talking about is Marxism; this person does not want her children learning about Marxism - and the hate for America that comes with it. Equity is part of Marxist, unholy trinity along with diversity and inclusion. Implementing equity is a deprivation of real education for children. Unholy Trinity: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion. Unholy trinity of equity, inclusion and diversity.

Many people brought in ideas from outside the BSD7 policy (ie. corporate training, D + I, programs, CRT and ect.).

7. **Worst Possible outcomes(expectations):** 3 x 5 cards are passed out. The facilitator asks the participants to answer this question

What are people saying are the worst possible outcomes for students of implementing an educational equity policy for Bozeman School District?

The policy could cause division or further polarization in the community. It could cause division. Division. Less unity. More problems/cultural battles. I see no downsides to the draft policy itself but implementing over loud objections may increase polarization in our community.

For the record: I struggle with the policy as written. it is so vague that it is not truly addressing equity. There is confusion about the "why" and about terms, leading to more frustration. Still cracks in the policy. If not implemented with clarity the policy can lower the bar for student success. The verbiage is not clear on intent and procedure. It could be used improperly. The language of the policy is so poor that there are no boundaries, only gray areas to operate and think - leads to confusion. Leading to mediocre education for all. Kids will be taught what to think, not how to think

School community falls apart completely, such that levies don't pass and partisanship hurts everything. Segments of our community will be so frustrated and concerned that they actively criticize the district and stop supporting the district. Our community misunderstands our why and how of equity and it becomes a sacrificial scapegoat for future problems in our district.

Might cost a lot of time, money and resources to implement it well. It would be implemented poorly and have no impact on the academic achievement of those who need better/different support. The policy does not drive and change in how kids are served. .

Equity may limit students (not challenged). Good students are encouraged to underperform. We help struggling kids at the expense of others. Kids will not be challenged. Lowering standards. Possibly lowering the bar for students.

Kids will learn that there is a limit to their achievement because they receive special treatment in a controlled setting that does not mimic the work world. Poor students are given the message that it is not their fault and thus are free to fail, ie. more will fail.

Groups are encouraged to look for privilege in others and discrimination. Students will see only their differences. Students are relegated to one of two categories: 1) victim, ie. you can do no good. 2) oppressor, ie. you can do no good. All students are reduced to identity politics, e.g. race, gender or sexual preference. Damage to some kids' families.

The policy will erode our social fabric. Further erosion of freedom of speech. Opposing views are seen as oppressive and those carrying out equity consider it a moral obligation to stifle these opposing views.

What are the worst possible outcomes for students in Bozeman School District of not implementing an educational equity policy?

All does not mean all. All does not mean all. The district would not be held to serve all kids as per policy (giving all kids what they need). All means all would only apply to students with federally mandated protection via special education and 504. Barriers remain embedded, and without policy to direct and resources to tap, gaps in opportunity and achievement widens. BSD7 is not able to ____ progress and hold itself to account. Status won't change without focus on all students' performance.

Nothing. Without the policy our kids will be fine as I am under the assumption that all already means all. I do not think anything would change. Policy needs to be written more clearly. Because the policy language is so poor, confusing and divisive, I do not believe there will be any harm to students by not implementing it. The idea as it stands and discussed is hard to understand. No boundaries, only gray areas to operate and think. Confusion.

Kids with significant needs will not get the help and support they need and deserve. Our public schools do not really help all members of the public including those with less opportunities. All students do not feel safe, welcome and included. We will not be able to close the achievement

gap. Achievement gap grows. The opportunity gap remains. the achievement gap does not close. Instead it widens. The education gap between high achieving and low achieving students continues to grow and our community and society continues to become more divided and polarized. Kids slip through the cracks. Kids would fall through the cracks.

Our kids are unable to debate divisive issues to a point of resolution and not all kids would feel safe and seen. Loss of hope for the future, feeling that loud voices derail community progress. The loud and persistent bullying of those who did not favor the equity policy - will be verbally beaten into submission. Those opposing the policy systematically targeted and experience cancel culture by means of threats, lack of access to resources and or harassment. Peace and acceptance. Less problems. higher and better standards.

This information is read off by each person before moving ahead. This raises people's concerns and fears to the level of consciousness. If not expressed these worst possible outcomes tend to become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Once all have read off their cards, an insight on Worst/Best outcomes is presented. The cards are collected before moving ahead.

8. **Best Possible Outcomes(expectations):** 3 x 5 cards are passed out. The facilitator asks the participants to answer this question:

What are the best possible outcomes you have for engaging in equity work in the Bozeman School District? *(If people felt that “equity work” was not the right approach they were asked to state so on their card).*

We would all see and feel the value in the conversation and even though we have different views we were walking to a similar place. so our kids would see how to navigate this being role modelled productively. Community cohesiveness is enhanced - we create together in consensus around a noble goal. Community is thrilled, trust is restored, value added.

Policy and resources allow ALL kids thrive, accessing education that is challenging, meaningful and individualized. All children would be able to access tools to learn and access opportunities. Identified institutional barriers would be removed to increase learning for all. We would lift all students up and provide individualized support to help all students reach their potential.

All students would see gains reflective of their ability. ALL children would look back and know they were given a fair and appropriate education upon graduation from Bozeman School District. Achievement increased for all students, students feel empowered and confident. While also communicating clearly across all platforms and knowing how to take accountability for success in their life. All really does mean all and it is codified in policy and this results in the district being accountable for closing the opportunity gap and closing the achievement gap.

The achievement gap will be narrowed. We have resources to deliver tangible outcomes. The achievement gap is lessened, so kids are not left behind. All means all including those who struggle and high achievers.

I oppose the equity policy and I hope this was not an exercise in futility in that this equity policy is a foregone conclusion.--The only foreseeable best outcome if equity policy in BSD7 was implemented for students would be customized, entry assessments based on skill, aptitude, intelligence and resources needed in order to fully challenge. SET the bar high! Each student to be the best version of himself or herself.

I disagree with the premise of the question....I disagree with equity *but* students --Each student is provided with exactly the tools and resources they need to become the best possible, with no limitations. IF it was right....all of our children no matter their situations, their backgrounds, their particular traumas or differences, would get all the supports they need to help them thrive, grow, and succeed. Students have the opportunity to reach their individual highest potential. Opportunity to reach individual highest potential.

We would have created a space where all kids feel safe, welcome like they belong and have the same amount of access to opportunity to live the life they choose. Inclusive culture, free from abuse, ____, kids feel safe and comfortable to be themselves. No student feels invisible; all students get the support they need.

Our community would recognize budget and resource limitations of the school system and would partner to fill the cracks in supporting all students.

This information is read off by each person before moving ahead. This expresses the purposes that the community wants to create through the managing equity in Bozeman School District. By expressing these, the possibility exists they can become self-fulfilling prophecies.

9. **Closure and Advice:** 3x5

This activity brings a closure, allowing community members, students and educators answer to this question is normally that the experience was a good one for them, it created the kind of learning environment they want, one that is caring, respectful, understanding, and acknowledging. The same occurs for the adults.

Each person answers in turn:

How do you feel about this session?

What advice do you have that will help the Bozeman School Board and Staff create an educational equity policy and committee that will support the best possible outcomes you describe you want for Bozeman School District students? (specific) (If people felt that "equity work" was not the right approach they were asked to state so on their card).

My ADVICE:

I am not sure an equity policy needs to be changed. How would this policy change BSD7? During the District presentation (--) mentioned how the things talked about already are things happening in Bozeman. The policy should not be treated as though it is a foregone conclusion. Don't treat this policy outwardly as a foregone conclusion without first telling us. You should not implement an equity policy. You are still not listening! Loss of trust. BSD7 can not move ahead with this work without a breach of trust.

Unpack equity. Start over with a problem statement and a blank slate: Identify barriers and list them. Be radically transparent with your intention. I can't get past the word equity. Six out of eight members tonight did not speak favorable of this policy or the word "equity" (plainly put; carry out the will of the majority and grow a backbone). There may be a limit to consensus - the word equity remains a problem. But BSD7 must move forward with a robust plan _____. Hear out differences, and then move forward. Don't let the turkeys get you down!

Be radically transparent with your intentions with any policy. Be very explicit in your language. Say exactly what you mean. Hold the line loosely. Seek out external support when needed. If BSD7 wants to lead, then lead. "Equity": if following a narrative that has not been defined and agreed to.

Today's session revealed a surprising consensus around certain topics, build on that! Empower ALL. ALL Means ALL is a widely shared goal! Redirect effort away from equity and focus on developing a policy on achievement for all: drop focus on gap, disadvantages, race, gender etc. Develop achievement goals and use international schools as the benchmark. Provide better technical training for teachers. I feel that this time a new policy is not needed. I feel that the district needs to focus on the following: MOST important - strong curriculum, smaller class sizes and professional development/continued education. Young teachers need resources.

Discard and disband the equity committee. Re-establish the task force with new members - be transparent. Bring opposing viewpoints to task forces. Invite diverse panels with new perspectives into the process. If ALL does mean ALL, then you should have opposing members. There should be a counter to Chris Young Greer and the MT Racial Equity Project and readings.

Send out a district wide survey on this topic and others if you really want a larger sample of feedback. The Board thus far ignores and the community is told that surveys are divisive. No, not listening to the majority is divisive.

I do not think equity is the right work to help all students. I believe our disconnect as a community trying to engage together lies in our difference in values, not challenges of what our skin color is, or, what history said we did or did not do. I think we need to teach kids/students that they are valued by teaching them actionable skills to live, survive and thrive. For example: civics, law, finance, how to keep a home and pay bills. teach them that no matter where they come from or what they look like, they can thrive and contribute in this world. They need skill,

jobs, work and purpose. Our laws are already set up to succeed - we need to reinforce that (ex.Skills USA). Maximize effective classroom instruction on core subjects and limit distractions. Identify those who need an additional resource and tailor those resources to boost achievement. Ensure tailored resources are effective, if not, try a different approach. GIVE resources for all levels of achievement.

The persistent push for adoption or consensus to accept the draft equity policy completely dismisses any opposing viewpoints. Rather the community engagement merely checks a box to say yup, we got feedback.

Let's not make Bozeman into california.

10. **Honoring: (Optional, if there is time.)** The purpose of honoring is to allow each of the groups to acknowledge and appreciate each other. The facilitator has everyone stand first. Then...

- The Board and District staff/listeners honor the community members. (The community members first go to the center of the circle and one chosen Board or District staff person honors them.)
- The community members the listeners. (Listeners go to the center of the circle and one or two chosen community members honor them.)

COLLECTIVE STATEMENTS: Collective statements are prepared from all the information collected. Collective statements provide a cohesive picture of what the participants' advice is, and provide a focus for the District Board and staff.