Policy #3610, Interim Superintendent Presentation, December 13, 2021

This evening you as the Board of Trustees are considering the revisions to policy #3610, this is the second reading of the proposed policy revisions that were last discussed on November 8, 2021. A reminder that earlier revisions to Policy #3610 were tabled in June due to heightened concerns in the community. Since June we have spent considerable time and resources walking through a community input process that specifically included eight professionally facilitated listening sessions in August and September that totalled over 30 hours of community engagement with our team. HR Director, Pat Strauss, Deputy Superintendent Instruction, Marilyn King, and myself attended every one of those sessions. Individual and collective summary reports from the community conversations were created and shared with participants and the wider community. Those are available on our website. Key takeaways from the listening sessions were:

a. The community has many and varied opinions and definitions regarding the term 'equity'.
b. The community has broad agreement in the District striving to meet the individual needs of all students.
c. The community embraces the District choosing language that will decrease polarization.

You will notice that the term equity was removed from the policy to align with those key takeaways. That drew applause from some community members and harsh criticism from others. As mentioned earlier, it is very clear to me that equity has become yet another topic that is politicized and polarized. I have communicated from the start of this process that equity, inclusion, and diversity are hallmarks of public education. We have tried to communicate that the long-standing educational definition of equity is rooted in providing equitable opportunities for all students. Giving each student the support they need to move forward towards the constitutional mandate of developing their full potential.

I want to draw your attention to the four bullet points in the draft policy. In summary those four bullet points put the District on the hook for:

1. Differentiating Student Support
2. Eliminating Barriers to Success
3. Addressing Achievement Gaps
4. Focusing resources

If that isn't the definition of equity in action I don't know what is. So, yes, we removed the term from the policy to reduce polarization. But hear me clearly, we have been doing, we are doing, and we will continue to do equity work in Bozeman public schools. We meet students where they are at with competent and compassionate teams of educators and do all we can to meet the needs of each individual student. We aren't afraid to use the word equity in Bozeman Public Schools.

I also want to use this opportunity to address the larger issue I see facing our school district, community, state, and country. While we are not afraid to use the term equity, it has become very clear that we need to be wise with our use of language. We have weaponized language in this country and use words to further divide and draw attention to political beliefs or which side of the issue you are on. We have moved to an extremely unhealthy place where if we disagree on a topic or the political issue of the day, we also paint the person we disagree with broad strokes and claim they must also be an evil person.

This anger, vitriol, and animosity is everywhere you look. It is on every television news station, it is in our local newspapers, letters to the editor, it is sometimes present during our own Board meetings.

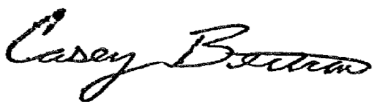
The main point I want to make this evening is that our students are watching. We frequently hear about and are experiencing in our schools students who are struggling socially, emotionally, and behaviorally and we wonder why. One of the many things that keeps me up at night is the heavy toll it is taking on our students to grow up in a world full of anger and angst.

We have an opportunity this evening. We can wrestle about which words are or are not in the policy, or we can recognize that policies are never perfect, that the policy was the result of many hours of community input and feedback, the policy is rooted in meeting the diverse needs of all of our learners, and we can model what it looks like for a community to come together to get to the real work of actually holding ourselves accountable to the bold commitments built into the policy.

We have real work to do on behalf of students, we have achievement gaps to close academically and socially/emotionally, and we need all hands on deck to do so. As a community I urge all of us, Trustees , administrators, staff, parents, and community members to check our politics at the door, and come together on behalf of our students.

I recommend the Board of Trustees approve the policy updates as presented.

Casey Bertram, Interim Superintendent



CORE Purpose - Bozeman Public Schools exist to provide an outstanding education that inspires and ensures high achievement so every student can succeed and make a difference in a rapidly changing world community.