August 28 Session 1 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.)***

There is vagueness in the definition of equity. *We should look at language that brings unity. Unity vs equity. Equity is a hot button word. Wondered if the verbiage had changed- consider writing terms that were less triggering. Certain Hot-button words can be divisive, triggering outrage. "Unity however is inclusive.*

Wondering if changing the language around because what the district is already doing (words) is causing issues. Change the language to a more unity/unified verbiage might be better. is this just a verbiage change (unity vs equity). Keep it simple. If it seems we are just changing terms to mean the same thing.

Encourage space for the shyer students to have a voice. Desire for space for shy students to be heard. *Students should be able to speak their viewpoint, even if it is different from the majority. We need to ensure students who have opinions or benefits that are not aligned to the majority in the room have safety to voice their opinions. Wants all kids to feel like their voice could be heard.*

To create all the kids equal without extra treatments for certain groups. Equity. Equal rights…. not extra rights. Desire for students in grade level to be treated equally (don't pass them until they are ready). *Some community members want students treated equally, without special treatment for certain demographic groups.*

We should treat all kids equally, and not give preferential treatment. Everyone should be equal; treated equally. Wants all students to be treated equally. Everyone is treated fairly. Everyone to be treated equally and does not want special consideration for certain groups, but really just wants everyone treated equally.

Some community members like the equity work they see in Bozeman schools. Equity is important.Equity work is important in Bozeman public schools. Wanted to learn - interested in what the district is doing and would like to be engaged in the process. To be more involved with the equality topic and get a more in depth understanding.

Not all community members fully understand the work that is happening in the district's equity process. Don't know much about what goes on in the district with regard to equity. Here to learn more about what the district is doing because they don't know.

Don't know what is currently happening in the school district. *Would like to learn more about the equity work and has seen pieces of it in the schools (I want to know more about that). Support for the work and would like to be a part or contribute to it.*

A personal story - A second grader grabbed her mom and call me a "racist cowboy". Her mom stated that she got that from a second grade school teacher in Bozeman. White and cowboy = racist.

There is a misconception of the equity policy being Critical Race Theory. The concern of erasing history, teaching theories rather than facts. When in reality the equity concept summarized appeared to be more of a revision of the disability or discrimination acts already in place.

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?

Division in the community. Further divide in the community - not united in it.

Equity is a polarized and politicized word and causes division. It becomes polarized and leads to non-support of our schools. Some members of our community become so frustrated and angry that they actively campaign against the district. It is confusing because what people are mad about does not seem to impact student outcomes.

It is unnecessary. It creates a lot of extra drama around each group having an identity. To categorize students by racial and other "disadvantaged" group. Equity work focuses on differences and causes further division. Takes away from "real" education. Creates and unfair advantage for certain classes of individuals. Takes resources away from my kid.

People are confused about why we have a policy and what the definitions are. I must admit I do not understand the equity work that is happening in the district and I am a district employee.

Equity is interpreted as equal outcomes and it will inevitably lower the bar for all students. The equity work will pull resources from some to give to others. It increases inequity and discrimination. Programs allowing acceleration may be eliminated.

Terms like equity, diversity and inclusion are code words for Critical Race Theory. Tied to ____ of CRT. so may be blamed for events in history. Some people believe they will be made to feel guilty for the color of their skin. Brings a communist/Marxist approach to our education system.Political agenda is being spread through schools.

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

It sends a message to students that all does not mean all. Not all students feel safe, welcome and included. The achievement gap remains unaddressed. The student achievement gap widens and kids fall through the gaps. The achievement gap does not close, the opportunity gap does not close. The achievement gap widens.

We create an assembly line education system where every student gets the same thing. Kids do not get the support they need to be successful in school and life.

Long-standing systemic inequities in our community remain in place and unchallenged. A subset of Bozeman's kids will remain disadvantaged and unable to reach their potential, through no fault of their own. Students may be treated unfairly or marginalized. Some may not receive the supports/services.

Bullying. Students suffer in silence and endure school - live in fear. The shy students, especially, never find themselves until after public school. Students do not explore their academic potential. Kids are treated poorly and do not have models re; how to work through challenges and differences in a constructive way that is needed for democracy.

Keep teaching on reading, writing and math - parents and community will do the rest. Teach - not indoctrinate about sex, politicized ideas about sexual orientation, gender identity, or other thoughts.

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 embrace that all means all. The community unites in support of students and education. The rising tide lifts all ships and each student soars. Students have voice, agency, and choice in pursuing their passions and goals.

Students - all students, will be repeated and treated fairly and honorably. Students will be acknowledged for their uniqueness with recognition that their uniqueness enhances the collective whole.

There is an understanding that different ways are not right or wrong, just different. They have skills to listen to different viewpoints and reflect on them. Students grow to become open minded community members. I don't have a clear sense. BUT I hope we create an educational system where every student has the opportunity to become a fully actualized adult...productive, healthy participant in our society.

Students get the supports they need to explore their interests and potential. They are able to become engaged and contributing citizens who help make the world a better place by learning the skills to solve complex world problems. Students can explore all academic interests. Every

student has every opportunity to reach their potential. Students realize their potential. __ __ __ result in significant academic growth for all. Achievement gap closes.
Students feel safe. All students feel valued; no student feels invisible or diminished. Free speech, to either speak or not speak and to affirm or not affirm messages or ideas that violate their beliefs or conscience.

No picking winners or losers victims/non-victims. All are created equal regardless of…..

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:

Emphasis on a safe place to have an opinion. Emphasize it is to provide a safe environment and provide the resources to be successful (and sometimes that is cultural ex. interpreter). I am fearful that minorities do not feel comfortable speaking out. Be proud of what you are instead of forcing what some think should be.

Continue to offer space for the community to be heard. District work on equity is important. Equity does not necessarily look like what we have always done or used to do.

Disband the equity committee, currently it is disruptive and has no clear objective.

Tweek the existing policies. Summarize and keep it simple. Once that is done then avoid the trigger words. Avoid trigger words. Shift it towards unity and inclusion. Switch from "equity" to "unity", less triggering language.

Focus on equality … not equity of outcomes. You can not rise ALL to the same level, ever. Just

give each child equal opportunity. Don't focus on equalizing outcomes. All start equal. Less focus on "equity and more teaching that all are equal.

When I think of equality it already exists, the laws are there, disability act and discrimination Act. Avoid entitlement, provide according to the "ACT"

The community recognizes the limits of public education budgets and resources and partners to fill in the gaps.

Teach that one's equity cannot violate another person's equity.

Base it on facts.

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.