

August 27 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 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.)

Some wanted to learn more about the work being done currently. Some did not know much about the equity policy (e.g. technology) but definitely sees inequities in the community (access to transportation and ect.).

The engagement around equity is important. The district is doing important work in thinking about equity. Inequity exists in schools. Potential, because of growth, for existing inequity to widen, important to think about and address. I heard support for equity work - important in public schools. Equity work is important. Equity in the public school system is important. Equity work in public schools is essential. Important work that needs to be done, especially in a public school district.

Equity is important in this community. Equity is important in education. The pandemic brought out the fact that many people did not have access to computers.

There is worry about the undeniable wealth that's coming into the area and how that is going to have an effect on all families in the community. I agree that inequality does exist in Bozeman, however we live in a fallen world and perfect equity is unattainable. Inequality exists in the Bozeman Community. *People acknowledged there is an economic divide in the community, growing larger.*

There is a growing disparity of wealth in the community. We want to be sure that those without have the same opportunity to succeed in public school. Leveling the playing field. *Some people are not sure if they will be able to live here long term because it is too expensive. There has been an increase in socioeconomic inequality in town. With the influx of wealth in Bozeman equity work becomes even more important - there is definitely inequity.*

Price of housing and cost of living is too high forcing people to leave. I worry about how the wealth in the community will increase the gap for those kids in lower socioeconomic households and how they are gaining the same access to quality education. Bozeman may become unattainable as a community to live in - the divide between wealth and people without wealth. Socioeconomic disparity is getting larger in Bozeman and will continue to create gaps.

The language used in the policy - that breaks down groups of people into categories (race, gender, etc.) is actually more divisive than bringing people together, especially during such a divisive time in our history. *Equity work is divisive when you break out categories. Just say 'All'.* Dividing people into social, racial and gender groups is divisive. Dividing people into groups is divisive. We should be talking about all. Public schools need to be inclusive and sensitive to all

groups. *It is important to serve all kids.* Public schools need to present opportunities for everyone to succeed regardless of wealth, race sex, orientation and etc.

The district equity policy will create more division as it breaks the district students into subgroups instead of just saying ALL. The language in the antidiscrimination policy will cause more division than inclusion. *The nondiscrimination policy as written will divide the community. Separating people into groups creates division instead of unity. Non-discrimination policy is divisive.*

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

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

The unknown - we don't know what we don't know - unintended consequences. People do not understand why an equity policy was implemented and this leads to confusion and frustration.

Some may feel targeted or singled out. Resources from one group are taken to give to another.

It creates a further divide in the community. Creates divisiveness between groups. Further division of the community and school. Step back, look at how, just the discussion, has been before even passing the policy. Similar to the mask policy there are people that have strong views on both sides. There needs to be more community discussion and Q and A. If the language is polarizing or politicalized, people will take sides regardless of the actual intent.

Community anger results in loss of support and they vote down critical levies, thus impacting educational opportunities. Some members of our community will be angry and will actively campaign against our public school system. Attendance will drop. Create more divisiveness - the timing. Not that there is ever a good time, but, is this one more thing?

If not implemented with integrity it could result in a lowering of the bar for all students. Some students would benefit from it less than others. No progress is made to close achievement gap.

I do not see how striving for equity could harm anyone - except if those that are against it use as an excuse to lash out at anyone that might benefit. It is my hope that BSD by providing this community conversation this can be avoided.

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

The district is not committed to serving all kids in the policy. All won't mean all. It sends a message that all does not mean all. All kids may not be served. There will be groups of students who do not feel safe, welcome and included. Students with supports (family, money and etc.) will still achieve while others do not. Some students would suffer from inequity or inequities in the system. Students fall through the cracks. Kids slip through the cracks.

Are kids getting left behind? Or are they subject to unnecessary hardships? It is a public school - by the nature of such-using public dollars all kids need to have the ability to come out of the district with the same outcomes(graduate). Educational gaps grow and our graduation rates decline. Widening of the achievement gap.

Inequity may continue to exist or get worse. The achievement gap gets wider. Gaps. The opportunity gap continues. The achievement gap continues. More students do not succeed and our community grows weaker. - suicide, fights and crime increases.

School as normal and the community can have a cooling off period.

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).*

A thoughtful approach takes place.

All really does mean all. All means all. Equal opportunities for all. All children's best interests are represented. Good is no longer good enough and we get serious about addressing barriers to learning for all students. No child would be left behind and have access to all the resources that he or she needs to succeed.

All kids, no matter what, will be given an education that meets them where they are. Important to provide everyone with the same opportunity to succeed. It engages in steps to take each child where they need to go by acknowledging needs, resources, so that all can be successful and have access to opportunities. The opportunity gap closes. The achievement gap closes. Achievement gap closes.

All students feel safe, welcome and included. All bias would be removed from the school. All students feel welcome at school and feel supported. All students feel confident with who they are and what they stand for.

Even if there is no equity “policy” the community and the district are more aware of issues and potential issues and we grow stronger and the achievement gap is narrowed. The entire community is focused on ensuring the success of each and every student. Helping and committed to raising, educating and supporting them so they can become the best version of themselves.

We create a community where children see and experience civic engagement. They feel supported, know they are cared about. A sense of community is important for better life outcomes. The community comes together to fill in the cracks that are present in the district.

People understand the phrase, “a rising tide lifts all ships” as it pertains to students and the district. Kids to understand inequity and the how and why for educational “playing field” to be level. Kids develop critical thinking skills and leave our district well prepared to lift their community up. We have a stronger community workforce -positive economic outcomes in the long run.

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:

Make it as diverse as possible. Remove the long list of groupings from the policy (race, gender, ancestry, and ect.) and say “ALL”. Remove the Equity task force.

Keep the work going and evolving. I don’t know if doing what you are doing is a great

start. I think taking it slow (like you are doing today). Get input from students about where they see/feel problems, get them involved in the process (are they already?)

Talk about inequity - cop to it first, admit that it exists. Testimonials. Look at data from others that have done this, or, if it does not exist, are there bits and pieces of the policy that can be pulled out to look at things that have positive outcomes? Shape that information and take an evidence based approach. Use of evidence based assessment and instruction, I need a definition.

When we get to know people that are different from us we gain a sense of understanding.

There are only two genders.

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.