

MARCH 17, 2010
Paul Rodrigues Administration Bldg.
455 County St.
New Bedford, MA
6:30 P.M.

**MINUTES OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING ON CURRICULUM
AS AMENDED 4/12/10**

PRESENT: Dr. Fletcher, Ms. Pollock, Mrs. Ussach (chair), Mr. Winn (advisor)

ABSENT: None

Mrs. Ussach called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M.

Mrs. Ussach opened the floor to discussion on agenda item 1; proposed Welcoming Schools Program for year two.

Ms. Pollock asked for a recap of the last meeting during which the year two program discussion was tabled.

Dr. Fletcher and Ms. Ussach clarified that the sub-committee wanted to have the first-year Welcoming Schools program available to see which resources were available to ensure balance in addressing bullying issues.

Matt Riley, Principal of the Taylor School where the Welcoming Schools program is being piloted, explained that the year one focus was on bullying while the year two focus is on gender stereotyping and family diversity.

Rev. Steve Rodriguez reiterated his support for education to keep all children feeling safe and welcome. He mentioned personal experiences with bullying on the basis of race and stressed that bullying based on race and ethnicity remain major problems.

Mr. Riley mentioned that the year one Welcoming Schools bibliography has many anti-bullying resources addressing the spectrum of causes.

Ms. Pollock mentioned that race is mentioned often in the year two program.

Rev. Rodriguez agreed, but stated that the books he had been given to review did not deal with race.

Mr. Riley agreed, saying that books on gender issues had to be purchased because they are not readily available in libraries; the other anti-bullying topics and resources are fairly easy to obtain.

Rev. David Lima indicated that he wanted to remind the committee that he had advocated for the Committee's acceptance of the year two program during the January 20th Sub-Committee meeting; he did not try to stop the program. Rev. Lima commented that he only stated that there

needs to be balance as many instances of bullying based on race and ethnicity occur. He stated an understanding of the time constraints faced by teachers and indicated that schools need one program that teachers can use to address all the issues.

Jill Ussach confirmed that the safety needs of all children must be addressed.

Lisa Langis, advisor to the Gay Straight Alliance and a librarian at New Bedford High School offered two comments. As school librarian, she reminded the Committee that one requirement to receiving federal and state funding for library resources is that all affected groups must be covered. Thus, the need is to acquire materials for gender as the others are covered through multiple resources. If we do not acquire materials to address Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender issues, we will lose funding.

The second point Ms. Langis made involved personal experiences being bullied over matters of sexual orientation, as well as detailed accounts of bullying toward LGBT students that she regularly sees in her current position at the high school. Unlike bullying issues involving race, ethnicity, and other matters, teachers and school officials do not deal with LGBT bullying. She stated, "It's not O.K. to use the 'n' word, but 'faggot' is just as wrong." She stated an additional problem often faced by LGBT kids: unlike other victims of bullying, these kids may not even get support from home.

Ms. Ussach agreed.

Ms Pollock commented that it appears that the new anti-bully legislation will have, "No teeth." She further stated that certain "isms" have been dealt with – though not to the extent needed – but the focus on LGBT issues is not there. She noted anecdotally that she is aware that some teachers do not address anti-gay behaviors.

Rev. M. Cochrane noted that the group should not fear, "Scarcity of compassion." She mentioned that it is likely in today's society that a bi-racial child may be adopted by a gay couple. She stated that it is critical to address LGBT issues because they are currently "silent."

School Committee member Larry Finnerty noted that keeping kids safe is the law. He noted that the "Beverly" decision forces districts' hands in having explicit procedures for keeping LGBT – and he would add Q (questioning) kids safe. He stated that if the Office of Civil Rights were to ask how we're keeping these kids safe, we would have no answers. Dr. Finnerty stated his hope that the issue would not become a polarizing one. He indicated that there may be a "hypersensitivity" to the LGBT discussion as new words can cause apprehension. He stated that teachers need training in how to address LGBT issues.

Beverly Baccelli, a social worker who runs an adoption agency and has been involved with state-wide work on LGBT issues beginning with Gov. Weld in 1994, stated that the LGBT community researched programs for over a year before recommending Welcoming Schools. She stated that the search began because teachers were asking for resources to address LGBT issues as they arose in their classrooms and most other anti-bullying and anti-violence programs do not address LGBT. Through her work in adoption, she knows of children in kindergarten being raised by gay parents. These children are easily "invisible" in school – to their detriment – unless a teacher recognizes their need and deals with the issues

Ms. Baccelli noted that a focus on the elementary grades is the best way to prevent children from becoming bigoted. Young children look up to their teachers. If the teacher does not explain

why offensive language is intolerable, children may not get the message from home. As a social worker, she feels that there needs to be a much more pronounced effort (toward LGBT issues).

Rev. Bill Bradbury thanked the Welcoming Schools group for the work being done, and indicated that not all members of the faith community see LGBT issues the same way.

John Masson – a social worker who coordinates school-based programs – indicated that the Welcoming Schools program was chosen because others reviewed did not address LGBT issues.

A parent – Bethany Touré – told the story of safety issues faced by her son. Her child is a mixed race, with a father who is, “As black as I am white.” When her child stated that he didn’t want to be brown anymore, the schools were quick to act on the hurtful comments that classmates were making. Years later, Bethany’s partner is a woman. Once again, her child is facing hurtful comments because his mom has, “a woman lover.” This time, however, teachers did not address the matter. Ms. Touré stated that silence on the part of the school tacitly condones anti-gay bigotry. She stated that teachers do not have the tools to address anti gay comments at the current time. She stated that the year one program did little to address LGBT issues but that year two begins to address these matters and provide teachers with resources.

Ms. Ussach agreed with Dr. Finnerty that teachers need training “here and now” in order to address LGBT issues. She stated that the worst thing you can have is silence (this was met with general agreement), and that kids are what they learn.

Dr. Fletcher indicated that he would like to make a couple of comments and then a motion. He clarified that the reason for tabling the Welcoming Schools year two program was that the year one program was not available at the last meeting. The Sub-Committee wanted all involved to have access to the prior year’s program in order see the larger picture. He also thanked the speakers for their eloquence and mentioned that many of the students he works with are cause for hope; open-minded and accepting.

Dr. Fletcher then motioned, through Ms. Ussach, that the year two program be accepted, and that Dr. Bonner be approached to appoint a committee to look into these matters further.

Ms. Ussach asked if anyone else wanted to speak on the matter.

Liz Dicarlo – a nurse manager – echoed Dr. Finnerty’s call to address the matter. She stated that having teachers who welcome these questions and look to provide answers, and who welcome these kids into their class and school will result in an environment that will be richer for all.

Lisa Andrade, principal of the Campbell School where the Welcoming Schools program is being piloted, reminded the group that the current work is part of a 3-year pilot. She stated that the piloting principals (Matt Riley, Paula Bailey, and herself) are aware of how important it is to expand the work to the other schools in the district. Through the pilot process, the three schools have had the chance to see what works, and each school has seen improvement.

Mrs. Ussach reiterated that anti-bullying approaches must be all-encompassing.

Ms. Pollock stated that there may be another incident (a reference to the attacks at Puzzle's Lounge) down the road. She stated that the schools are set up to address the issues because of their ability to work with large numbers.

Mr. Riley mentioned that effective work must involve "all the resources in the room" in terms of prevention, intervention, treatment, and after-care. He stated that everyone must work together if these efforts are to succeed.

At this time, Dr. Fletcher made a motion to accept the year two Welcoming Schools pilot program – seconded by Ms. Pollock - and it passed with a unanimous vote.

Ms. Ussach asked if there were any final comments

Rev. Lima reiterated that he had asked for the program's approval at the January meeting.

Sally Finnerty – school librarian – informed the group that the SAILS network is an excellent resource for getting appropriate materials into schools from the kindergarten level on up.

John Masson asked what the procedure is for continuing the Welcoming Schools program beyond the three year pilot.

Dr. Fletcher advised him that the piloting schools would be reporting back to the sub-committee with recommendations, and that the committee would take it from there.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:40 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Dennis M. Winn
Assistant Superintendent