

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee Meeting

April 10, 2025 | 5-6 pm | HS Boardroom

In attendance: Jenna Audlin, Drew Benware, Nancy Bernstein, Melissa Butler, Josh Dann, Meg Farrell, Diane Fox, Joe Henderson, Melissa Lambert, Kelly Metzgar, Amy Oliveras, Ruth Pino, Carly Ulrich Terreberry

AGENDA

1. Joe Henderson led the meeting, which began with reintroductions of all committee members' names and roles within the SLCSO. The committee had not met since February.
2. Naturalization Ceremony held at the High School on Friday, April 4, 2025
 - Committee members at meeting who attended this event: Jenna Audlin, Drew Benware, Nancy Bernstein, Melissa Butler, Josh Dann, Meg Farrell, Diane Fox, Amy Oliveras, Ruth Pino
 - Diane shared that the District was contacted in regards to hosting a Naturalization Ceremony for individuals in the North Country who have completed their journey towards US citizenship and will be administered the US Oath of Allegiance and receive their Certificate of Naturalization. Judges like to host this ceremony in schools. Diane and Josh worked with the officials to plan and organize the ceremony, which was hosted in the high school auditorium - all HS students, faculty and staff attended as well as family and friends of the individuals being honored and naturalized as citizens of the US.
 - Josh and Diane shared that the students and staff did not know what to expect, and that the experience was new and moving for all attendees.
 - 18 people were sworn in as new citizens, representing 16 different countries. Committee members in attendance reported back that everyone was very proud, the speakers were great, and that it was extremely special to host this ceremony at the SLHS.

- Ruth (Food Service Director) shared that one of her wonderful cafeteria staff, Esmina Cecunjanin, originally from Montenegro, was naturalized at the ceremony by some last minute coordination with the governmental department - and that it was extra special that she could be a part of this specific ceremony. Esmina is a dedicated District employee, and her family, friends, colleagues, and students were able to cheer her on and recognize this accomplishment.

3. The document:  040425 DMB to OCR re Request for Title VI Certification.pdf was shared with all committee members by Joe Henderson.

- This is a letter from the New York State Education Department - sent to the US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights on April 4, 2025
- Joe explained the letter and its impact on the SLCS District, and is available to answer questions if needed
 - NYS is very robust with civil rights and DEI work will continue to be a part of the purview of school districts in New York
 - DEI Policies and programming in the SLCS District will continue as legally stated by the governing body of NYS
 - The Federal Supreme Court has the legal ability to override state constitutions, but has not done so in regards to DEI policies at this time. New York was one of the first states to push back against the Federal DEI requirements, but this letter is one of the only public responses shared so far by our NYS government, which has so far been slow & quiet on the new regulations
 - Kelly brought up the passing of Prop. 1 in November 2024 in the NYS Constitution
 - Joe shared that dismantling the Dept. of Education would take a Federal Act of Congress
 - The SLCS District does receive Title 1 Federal funding
 - The Board and District continue to support DEI initiatives and work, and will follow the advice of the SLCS District legal counsel

- All meeting attendees received a printed copy of the letter
4. Diane shared an email sent to her 4/10/25 from former student and DEI Committee member, Jake Niederbuhl. This email was addressed to the committee and all present members were given a paper copy of the email to read and review.
- The email was primarily in regards to the name of the committee and the importance of its work in the SLCSD
 - Discussion of this email will be added to the agenda for next month's committee meeting, and the conversation about the word choice and name of the committee will be tabled for discussion in May.
5. Begin review of committee goal to look at the SLCSD Code of Conduct through a DEI Lens:
- The SCLSD Code of Conduct will be reviewed by many departments and edited/revised by the Board this summer in order to be approved for the 2025-26 school year
 - Examples of departments conducting reviews: Athletics, Safety, DEI, District-Wide Committee, ETC.
 - The Code of Conduct was shared with the committee on screen as well as paper copies distributed to members as needed
 - NYSBA sample policies are updated with the laws and the SLCSD subscribes to these policy drafts
 - Melissa Lambert put together  Code of Conduct Analysis in the fall of 2024, and this document was distributed to committee members at the meeting. The analysis is a Crosswalk with the state Sample DEI Policy - focusing on the approach, language, and student impacts of the documents, and inconsistencies of the Code of Conduct and the DEI Policy.
 - Committee read and reviewed documents (first reading for majority)
 - Emphasis on language and word choice of Code

- Diane shared some reflections from NYSED Uplifting All Students Statewide Conference that she and Meg attended on March 19 in regards to this upcoming analysis
 - A district shared about their *Eligibility Process* - what students have to do in order to participate (vs. an ineligibility process focussing on negative consequences)
 - Positivity - language changes can be made to be more inclusive; success criteria, to balance out negative/positive, not just focusing on infractions
 - Full-circle: coupling with what is going on with curriculum - needs to be clear

6. Plan for next meeting

- Diane will bring back suggestions for the DEI committee review of the SLCSD Code of Conduct and how it will look
- Big Red will be added and included
- Committee will review her work and make suggestions
 - A draft of the documents will be shared with committee members before the May meeting
 - We will edit the document as a group

Next meeting: Thursday, May 8 | 5-6 pm