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Loudoun County School Board, Equity Committee Meeting, Thursday, December 7, 2023

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Place Loudoun County Public Schools / School Board meeting (see BoardDocs / LCPS-TV)
Length 1h 5m (video)

- Official meeting video (Vimeo / LCPS-TV): <https://player.vimeo.com/video/892405414?rel=0>
- BoardDocs (School Board): <https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/loudoun/Board.nsf/Public>

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[00:00:01] how you can be better. Our students need this. Black Lives Matter. Thank you. That concludes public comments. We'll move to the minutes and the approval of the November 2023 minutes. You were all emailed the minutes and of course they were posted on board docs. Is there anyone that would like to make the motion to adopt? Any any member can do that. Just please say your name and that make the motion if you're ready to do that. Erica Harris, I make a motion to

[00:00:38] accept the minutes all right is there a second second mark lucero smart all right now we'll open it up for discussion or any revisions to the minutes is are there any changes all right seeing none all in favor of the motion to adopt the november 2023 draft minutes please raise your hand and say aye those opposed and any abstentions all right seeing none that motion will carry

[00:01:09] that we're going to move to item four actually item five there's a little introduction i don't think that that should be in the printed minutes we're going to go right to unless someone wants to correct me to our information item which we have tonight laura freeman and cynthia lewis and i'm going to let you that is up to you if you want to sit at the table or go up there it's your

[00:01:48] choice if you would like to and please introduce yourselves and just before you get into your presentation introduce yourself serving remembers who you are they are both former members of the committee in case you weren't here when they served with us. And please also tell everybody what you

actually do in Loudoun County Public Schools. I think that that is something that would serve all of us well. And then you're going to do the information item on prayers, reflection, and meditation spaces for students. So we appreciate you all being here. And it is yours.

[00:02:22] Good evening, everyone. Can you hear me? Perfect. I am Cynthia Lewis, and this is Laura Freeman. And we are from the Division of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility.

[00:02:40] And we are just giving you an update tonight about what we heard from some students and parents at this committee meeting about establishing rooms for prayer, reflection, or mindfulness in schools. And we wanted to make sure to keep this committee updated.

[00:02:56] So we know it's important for schools to establish a space that really reflects the dignity and the significance of that purpose. And we have to make sure that the process is approached thoughtfully, as we want to find practices that are both supportive and that we find sustainable to students, so something that will be ongoing and an ongoing practice in LCPS.

[00:03:21] To that end, we are collaborating, that is to say our division is collaborating with the Adams Center, which is the all Dulles area Muslim society, to ensure that we address this process with understanding and sensitivity that it calls for.

[00:03:36] And we will also continue to collaborate with schools and students for additional perspectives and examples of best practices around the county. And Laura's going to talk about some of those now. Yeah, I get the fun part.

[00:03:51] So we recognize that every school across the county has varying needs from facilities, different room spaces, and scheduling structures. So we really wanted to highlight one school, Loudoun County High School's approach and their progress.

[00:04:07] So there, the administration, student activities, and engagement coordinator, and the school counseling team worked alongside students to establish spaces and times where students can be excused from class in order to pray or meditate. Teachers use the e-hall pass system for students who ask for a pass, and since space is a challenge at Loudoun County, students use the principal's office, which can accommodate both the male and the female prayers.

[00:04:35] A counselor or an administrator is nearby and available to students at this time. And expectations for staff include respecting student privacy and ensuring that students are given appropriate support in making up any content that they may miss. The leadership at Loudoun County High School shared information about their designated prayer locations and provided learning for staff around the prayer practices for Muslim students so that there's a greater sense of understanding and sensitivity.

[00:05:04] And so we really invite schools to reach out to the Division of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility as thought partners. And we encourage collaboration with students, families, and staff to ensure that students are able to learn and can reflect and can practice a fundamental part of their faith.

[00:05:23] So that's where we are now. Thank you. So I know you both were around this committee long enough to know that you're not going to get out of here without questions. so I'm actually going to ask the first question if everybody's okay with that so I'm all for building autonomy and principals and the school community itself being able to run their show however as the chair of this committee the equity piece of it is that's great that that's what Loudoun County is doing and I heard you say you welcome people to reach

out to you so I'm going to ask you to reframe that and how are we reaching out to the other schools to ensure the other

[00:06:02] buildings are also following a model where they can be autonomous in their practice but perhaps equitable across buildings? How's that for a long question? That's a great question and I think it's a part of our practice through the collaboration and through working with organizations like the Adams Center is really making sure that there's the background knowledge that's there and the capacity to really provide guidance and support so that we do have some fundamental shared practices throughout the county so we can be confident that we're going to build on this and and and bring it

[00:06:39] to all of our buildings that is our goal yes great all right I'll open it up to anybody else for questions or comments on this follow-up from our last meeting anybody Robin I would just add as we know communication is key so as you've reported out to us it would be nice to report out to all students and parents with a clear time frame of implementation if it's not at all schools immediately. Thank you. Can you turn your mic on? Thanks. Oh, okay. First of all, thank you. And

[00:07:18] I'm sorry I was a little bit late, so I missed a part of it. So forgive me if you already addressed it. So I believe you said in there that these spaces, usually there's like an administrator or someone that's nearby, right? So I know that I talked about the unique situation in our particular school is there some type of a solution for what we have what we're dealing with so I think that every building has to solve that particular issue the best way that they can so that we are really just calling up and highlighting what Loudoun County High School is doing they have the capability

[00:07:57] that someone is in the vicinity and is there to support students or be around if anybody needs any support but that's really how their schedule is working this year and what they're able to do so we when we have more official guidance and a better idea of really how to give a state a stated plan for schools that's one of the things that we'll have to be thinking about and getting feedback from schools on how they are making it work so we can help schools to make it work in their buildings as well okay all right thank you and I would add that one of the things that we work with principals a lot with the school buildings a lot and one of the things that we always talk about with them is the

[00:08:37] importance of being proactive and so our hope would be that all of the schools are thinking about this collaborating with their students and their families and they're making action they're taking action before it becomes an issue any other comments or questions concerns Erica just a just a quick question I know that this space has also been designated as like a mindfulness or if if someone wants to take that time for some mental health and meditation.

[00:09:12] I worry, and I think it's important that if we're going to implement something throughout the county, that there's an awareness to what the option for this is. But I want to be very aware, and I think we should all be very aware, of students who truly need this space for religious practice and monitoring kids who are going just to kind of meditate or have mindfulness time because, I mean, if I gave my son the opportunity to, he would be mindful all day long.

[00:09:46] So do you have any thoughts, or are you putting any feelers out for how to monitor something that way without infringing on the privacy of someone's religious practice? So I think that several schools already, they have some rooms for students to take a step back or to seek counselors, so there's already some spaces.

[00:10:11] So I think that schools are learning how to manage that and the counselors and the administrators and the teachers, they're very familiar with the students and they're able to have those conversations with students if that becomes an issue. So I think that leaning on the practices that are in place in addition to the relationships that are built with students and ways to making sure that that doesn't happen and making sure that there's enough that we're supporting what different needs because those are two different needs and that schools were able to support them in the ways that they know best how to do. So I'm going to follow on and maybe ask a question that perhaps neither one of you are going

[00:10:51] to be able to answer but I want to put it out there in the universe and for consideration and maybe more ideas from the committee as well. We as we talk about rooms for students to be able to have mindfulness and in looks differently in different buildings and opening that opportunity for students we've had presentations on social emotional learning here we've had the restorative practices presentation and the things that we are providing for our students outside of what some have deemed necessary education and perhaps educating and guiding the full student as a person

[00:11:26] and so I think that that gets pushback and as we move forward in in these practices and dealing with those who don't understand or support it in addition to what students really need and we can go back to when students needed food and we realized that that we started programs for that and when students came to school without the supplies they needed we made sure they had supplies and those were tactical things that we could all see and say oh that student needs new shoes or they need glasses so we would bring in eye doctors these students don't have dental care

[00:12:02] and maybe because they're and I'm just kind of talking up this is my stream of thought so I apologize but as we as we can look at the tangible things that we could see something that students needed rather than the feelings they're having and how we develop that emotional side of the student and how are we going to balance that moving forward and how are we going to counter the negativity that comes along with giving giving those services to students so if you have any thoughts on that or you just want to take it forward to all of the people who might address it Or I'm just going to look at Charles and say, do you have any thoughts on that?

[00:12:37] Because that's what you do. You like how I just point at you at the last meeting. Sorry. I guess I would like to know what do people think? Because we've had some counter to that. We see it at school board meetings. We've seen it here in public comment.

[00:12:54] We've seen it in the newspaper. We just, we hear it. So how do we counter it? So I'll let you guys start. And then if Charles, then I'll call on Charles. So I think it's important to recognize that our students are here to learn.

[00:13:11] And in order, like the things that we are doing are not extra things, they are the thing. They're the things that get our kids to be able to concentrate, to be able to be their full selves, because in order to really learn, you need to know this is who I am, this is who I value.

[00:13:28] And so when we provide situations like this where students who otherwise would not have the ability to practice their faith they may be sitting in that seat being not able to focus on their work and so really this is about treating our kids with respect and educating them to the best of our ability and providing the space for them to do that that's my ted talk charles did you want to weigh in sure so i'll try to answer this and hopefully this is not overly simplistic

[00:14:04] But I think that it goes back to every person, every student, staff member, bringing their whole selves to work or to school and being kind of who they are as a person and being their best selves. I don't think that it's particularly difficult if we value who people are.

[00:14:23] I think we find a way to create space. I remember being at PARC a few years ago and students praying in the conference room just kind of made it happen because that was important to them for Ramadan and different times of the year. I think on a very maybe practical level, have we talked enough about or at all about who might supervise these rooms or if that's even necessary for certain ages or groups of students?

[00:14:50] But I think that it's, if we value who people are, then we'll find a way to create some opportunity for them to have a space that allows them to be their full self, you know, even in school. Hope that helps a little bit. It did, and I would be happy if, now I'm going to pick on the principals that are here, if we could even expand further on some of that social-emotional learning and take it outside of a room and just embody the student that comes to the door every day.

[00:15:21] and what they need on any given day. And the tools that we give the students in order to cope with what might be happening at home, what they don't have, what they see other students going through, any of it. If anybody just, I guess, you know, as we wrap up this committee's year and have these final thoughts tonight, I guess I would love to hear where do we go from here?

[00:15:46] Where do we, how do we, and the next question I'm going to ask you during new business is, How do we inform the new board members about where this committee thinks the division should be headed and how to support them? So you can have that in your thoughts before we go there.

[00:16:02] So, Michelle. As I was listening, I was thinking about my students at the elementary level and not knowing what their needs are in terms of prayer. But I think it's an opportunity for me to reach out to the parents to let them know that it is a safe place to do so.

[00:16:22] And if it's something that they would want for their children to engage in that conversation, and as a faculty, think about how we can offer this space. I think a lot of kids at elementary are not going to say, I need this. But I think the parents, if we reach out, if I reach out, they would feel like, okay, I can have this conversation and together think about how we can provide that.

[00:16:49] So for me, it's an opportunity to engage my parents to say it's a safe place for kids to pray. I have one second-grade student who her teacher prays during the day, and she asked a teacher, and she's a very brave little girl, second grade, where can she pray?

[00:17:08] And the teacher invited her in her classroom during lunch, and they did so together. But she felt like she can go to her teacher to say that, And I hope that all of our kids would have that relationship. But I think for me, it's to reach out to the parents and engage in the conversation.

[00:17:27] So I'll just comment, because I guess I'm going to do that all night. No, I'm not really going to. I'm kidding. Two things that you said is your outreach and then actually engaging and allowing that safe space for the student is the second one, right? We all know that if a student has a teacher that they've connected to and that they feel safe going to and talking to, those two make a really, you know, if we made a square out of the student, the staff member, the parent, and the principal or administrator, that's a really nice square of people that really are supporting and circling that student. And I think that that's

[00:18:06] really an amazing, it's a nice little puzzle to put together. And maybe it's not so puzzling how we support the education of our kids. So thank you for drawing that picture in my head. And I know I said square and then circle so sorry Jill I had a question about whether or not the principals had seen that same presentation that we had from the parents and students you know as an equity lead in my school I had always kind of asked like especially during Ramadan it was an elementary school did we have a place to consider students who are fasting to go during lunch did we have

[00:18:44] a place for prayer but really hearing um i thought it was really instructive and informative to hear more of the details about the different times for the prayers um and i think that it would be great if we could give that presentation to principals if they haven't already heard um because maybe that would inspire more people to reach out to families it's a great first step to have that on your mind during certain times of year, but to think about how we can do that for our students on a more consistent basis.

[00:19:20] And also to offer it and like really out, like this idea versus just offering it and really making people feel welcome that that's something, it's not just, it's not an imposition. It's not like we are offering this to you like because it's important to you.

[00:19:39] So I really think hearing more information, just educating about why and the need and and really having students and families speak up I think I think would be really great thank you can you answer whether or not principals have been provided this information I don't think that principals saw that exact presentation that the equity committee saw and I think that is a part of our process is making sure that we're providing education and learning for our principals I know that many schools do provide spaces for students and we just as as you talked about just making it

[00:20:16] more a part of common practice that's not offered but that is available and we're reaching out to students to let them know that this is available and how it might work in the different schools thanks I'm gonna go back to something Michelle said about engaging parents and really going way back in my archives when I was a PTA leader and trying to engage families and get them to come to school and you know back then I think it was very much about making sure we put out our information in different languages and that it went out in print and voice messages and email and the best

[00:20:53] ways to really engage and that to me right now seems very surface level and very you know at the time it was a challenge and I think it's still a challenge that exists but I think there's so much more to it and I think having the principal's voice and showing that your building is open and welcome is really powerful and I'm not sure all of our parent groups ask for that and that that is happening so I'm really glad that you brought that up because you sent me kind of back into my when my kids were in elementary school which was a really long time ago so thank you for that Anna

[00:21:27] good evening so I have two comments about that one is that even as recently as yesterday in our principal update we received a flyer for msac that was only in english and so even though it's surface level we have a long way to go as far as that goes it's still a a concern we still have to ask for those things in our family's home languages on the regular and they are delayed so

[00:22:07] that is still a problem that is alive and well that we will continue to fight. And the next thing is that through our work with our affinity groups at Meadowland, that actually came up authentically with our families about needing a place for prayer. And so we do have a space for our students, But it is separate from our space for social emotional needs because at the elementary level, it's not always a quiet space when you have a space for social emotional needs.

[00:22:45] And we want to make sure that we're honoring that for our students. And so what we do is our families know that if they would like a space for their little ones to pray, they let us know the times and the duration. because elementary schoolers aren't the best at remembering the duration of time that their parents have requested for them.

[00:23:10] So we are available, but we do very little monitoring because we want to honor that privacy for them. But it is a common practice in our building now. Thank you. Erica? So that brings up a point that I think we have to be extremely cautious of.

[00:23:32] The idea that there would be staff members monitoring who's going, how long they're praying, if they're in there for the appropriate amount of time. I think that we can certainly encourage students to know that they have a place to pray, but I think it would be inappropriate for any staff members to remind a child that they need to go pray.

[00:23:56] Like you can remind them of the time where the parents can, but I just think that's something to be very mindful of. great. Mark? So here's a dumb question. Would it be helpful to call it a Muslim prayer room as opposed to just a prayer room that might eliminate some of the confusion or some of the potential problems? Just a dumb question. I think that schools are making sure that the students who

[00:24:32] need the space know that the space is there. These are like when we were at Loudoun County high school multiple spaces are used for multiple things but i do think that um i don't know if they had a name they don't they don't they're not naming it it wasn't that formal but it was formal in that teachers are aware students are aware there's a process for how students can access the room and that's what we want to see happening i'm actually saba if you don't mind would you

[00:25:05] remind us um your parents monitor your room is that correct can you just fill us in maybe anybody who wasn't here and also if the room has a name just some of the things that have come up thank you sure sure it's called at Independence High School it's called the reflection room and so we do have parents that monitor and so I not to hopefully this doesn't confuse everyone but as I said before there's five prayers right now that the daily daylight savings time is set in the afternoon prayer is also happening during the school hours so so we just were able to

[00:25:42] recruit another set of parent chaperones for the 3 30 to 3 45 time every day for this month of december um thankfully it worked out the principal reached out to me and i was able i mean we're fortunate that we have parents that are able to do this um but yeah so for this month and for january especially these two months are really critical because the kids cannot make that prayer at home um so yeah so that's and the reflection room is is what it's called thank you eric i think you had your hand up maybe it's because it's my last time today but i've got all these questions coming up

[00:26:20] um so i think again um in just kind of the role of devil's advocate i don't think that we could in any of the schools make any kind of designation as a muslim prayer room a jewish prayer room if it's going to be a prayer room i think it needs to be one that is multi or no faith there may be atheist children who have a moment of needing some specific reflection time because otherwise I think our entire buildings would be taken up with all the different faiths that we

[00:26:54] have in Loudoun County. Robin. I'm just concerned again about the equity in this whole kind of issue she mentioned that we're fortunate to have parents that can participate and supervise not all schools are fortunate enough to have parents that can supervise so in generally this equity issue happens even

when we call talk about after school classes and sports teams that some as we know some districts are well you know higher funded than others and some have a parent base

[00:27:32] that's available so this what we're talking about you know I would be curious to see where and how it's implemented at schools like how many schools have this designated room how many do not and I'm sure you'll see those that do not are probably our lower funded districts or lower funded schools and it always tends to hash out that way so I think we need to be purposeful when we're doing this implementation so it's fine that not all schools have it but there has to be a plan so all schools will you know for

[00:28:09] example I think a statement perhaps should come out that LCPS is dedicated to creating an environment that allows students to be their whole selves. With that said, we're implementing these rooms at these various schools on this particular schedule. It shouldn't be on the parent to assume that they can reach out to a principal that's not receptive of these type rooms and expect something to change.

[00:28:34] It always seems to be that way, where we should be proactive, like Brenda mentioned, that we're bringing this environment to every school and every student has an opportunity to utilize it. Thank you. Tom.

[00:28:54] So I appreciate that there are situations where some parents may be available to monitor some rooms in some schools. And we want our students to be behaving and respectful at all times during, well, during the whole day, not just the school day.

[00:29:14] But I guess I am wondering why there are other rooms in the school called the bathrooms where we don't necessarily have staff in there monitoring what's happening they may enter that room if there's a disturbance if somebody's in there for an extended period of time etc but there is an opportunity to go in there and and do what you need to do and so long as you don't abuse that privilege then staff doesn't really get involved so I guess I'm confused as to why we feel that we need to have staff necessarily in those rooms unless there's a reason that staff would have to enter those rooms because we already have that situation with restrooms and this is I know I compared it in the past to this which is this is sort of your mental health

[00:29:54] restroom if you will not to really sort of put it in that vernacular but but it is it is a room where you go and and now you're taking care of your mental health your priorities etc and so I don't see really necessarily a need that there's staff full-time in there monitoring what's going on in all cases unless there is an incident in which case then staff needs to be involved so I guess that's the question that's kind of brewing in my mind Charles? I like the point, Tom. My question would be maybe, again, back to principals or others,

[00:30:29] are there expectations for how long students can be unsupervised? So I'm hearing about the 15-minute prayer that was just mentioned at least throughout this month, maybe January, which I do think could be different than going to the restroom for a few minutes. But if students are going to be potentially unsupervised for 15 minutes, is there any expectation about that from policy or just common practice in buildings? And I think that could make it different. And then again,

[00:31:05] it could be a group of students together in a room. So I don't know if it's 5, 10, 15 or more, I'm not sure, but I think that could make it somewhat different than going to a restroom for a few minutes um that's just a question that i had i i had the same thought charles and i don't know if any of the principals

can weigh in on guidance that you know even even a teacher would need in an emergency to use the restroom themselves making sure that the teacher next door or perhaps an aide or someone is i having subbed for many years we didn't leave students alone in

[00:31:40] classrooms either so i don't know if you can just kind of give it the overall guidance if any of you Did I kind of cover it, or Anna, whatever? So we don't have someone directly in the room, but we have someone nearby.

[00:31:58] So the space that we use happens to be our library, and our librarian is, and our library assistant are super helpful, and basically we work with the parents to determine the times and when the students should be there and for how long, and the classroom teacher and the librarian collaborate, and so when the students are done, our librarian will either use a walkie-talkie or may just text, depending on if there's testing going on, and that the child

[00:32:32] is returning to class, because we did notice, this is what we had the conversation with parents, because we did notice that some of our little guys were going for 30 minutes, and so I just called the parent and said what what is an appropriate amount of time so that we can honor this and um so the parents and I worked that out and um so they the students know their schedule they they they're very good at it now that's great but it didn't come without engagement so

[00:33:05] I caught that part too um I really like Tom's sentiment as well but um it's hard because at this point we are also dealing with fentanyl in the district and i am on the leave committee and they were talking about like with restrooms even having a parent outside of the restrooms because of issues with students being by themselves for issues they're as serious as that in the district and i think it's really hard when we're at a time when we're um have such serious issues to let

[00:33:40] students be unsupervised where they could be potentially more harm in those and i love the idea of students being able to be by themselves I just the risk seems really high potentially if they are there unsupervised and so I just want to add that into the conversation. I think it comes with a balance of respect and honor I like to Anna's word honor and safety and monitoring and there has to be a balance there because there are so many more things happening and we just want to make sure that number one students are safe so thank you for bringing that up Haley appreciate

[00:34:15] it. Back to Erica. I promise this is the last time. I'm so glad to hear that you all are collaborating with the Adams Center because they're a phenomenal group and we've worked a lot with them through my synagogue. And I know that, I mean, we're all about, hey, if we need volunteers, anybody who's interested in volunteering, more bodies in the building means more things get done sometimes. So I wonder if just as a suggestion for schools that don't have staff members that are set aside to do that and we don't have parents who are able to monitor the rooms if in your collaboration with the Adams Center you might be able to talk to them about

[00:34:54] possibly organizing some volunteers who may be able to help out at the schools that need supervision I think I appreciate that suggestion and these are all great conversations that we need to continue to have as we look for what can schools do what are the answers to these questions and how can schools work out these problems and issues that they're finding and encountering when they're really trying to provide the students with what they actually fundamentally need in order to practice their faith and it's it's going to be some conversations and some collaboration and learning that's going

[00:35:30] to have to happen so that we can really provide the students with the support that they need and we can really get this right for our students sorry just one last comment. I echo a comment that was made earlier about the need for the training.

[00:35:48] It is so integral. Last year when the kids were going to pray, I don't know if I mentioned this, but one of the people, one of the admins, one of the secretaries, she often, she did not understand what they were doing.

[00:36:05] She had many comments. She made many faces, made the kids feel very uncomfortable. We had brought that up with the principal, and they felt really bad about that, but a lot of it is just education, you know, and so that is a fundamental piece of it, so just wanted to reiterate that please make sure, if you can, to make that a part of the process. Jill? Just speaking on the education part also, like I think, you know, bringing it to admin, bringing it to staff, but could we consider also, I think especially like in the middle school and high school years where

[00:36:44] students feel so some students feel so different and they don't want to have this feeling of feeling different and they might avoid doing things because they don't want to be seen as different whereas I think that again if we could reach out that education level to just sharing with other students about why they might be using a prayer room I think that our students are empathetic and they could be like so much more supportive of that if they if they had more education so if that could be a

[00:37:18] component to consider as well thank you any other thoughts or comments on this topic I just have one more question I could have missed this with my apologies a lot of what I've heard tonight seems to be kind of centered around the Muslim faith and maybe seasonal prayers of kind of based on the calendar it may begin for principals um has anyone done this kind of more globally not based on 15 minutes based on

[00:37:57] you know a certain season but just when any kid wants to pray throughout the day has that been implemented yet or has it been more around you know a certain time of year certain um you know holiday or observance or is it also being done globally that it's just wednesday morning at nine o'clock and I want to pray. It's not about any, you know, kind of formalized, you know, observance.

[00:38:21] All right. No, I apologize. So we do a lot of identity work at Goshen Post and making sure that every child's identity is acknowledged and celebrated and making sure that everyone has a sense of belonging, not just included, but really having the skills to advocate and the sense

[00:38:56] that they are welcomed and so are we have a few different spaces um and they're opened throughout the day um so whenever students need a space um to either pray or meditate or have a moment um they have access and our staff um is advocating for them as well um they're partnering with our families to make sure that those spaces are are known and that we um we have staff to support them as well to get to those locations and making sure that they are not missing any academic work

[00:39:32] within the building I just wanted to share something that we're doing that's really great thank you so it sounds like they're I'm just gonna wrap this up with it sounds like a lot of our schools and our principals are really engaged and our teachers are really engaged and we maybe we need to have more of this conversation amongst our school leaders and so I'm just gonna throw that back at you guys and let you take that and run with it it seems like there's a lot of really good happening and maybe if it was shared

it would help people who maybe don't know how to start the process which I think is really where you were going right yes absolutely thank you

[00:40:10] yes I just like to add that I think a really powerful way to distribute this information is through our equity leads and our schools because this is already a part of our culture our school culture and our equity leads are definitely seen as leaders in cultural awareness and it can be really helpful when staffs are learning something from their peers not just hearing it from a top down even though I always of course support my equity leads but this might be a good topic for

[00:40:48] an upcoming equity meeting and then disseminate it through a PD through our leads. Thank you appreciate that. So we're going to wrap this up now. Really appreciate all the comments and suggestions. And of course, we appreciate Lawrence. Lawrence, I would combine my Laura and Cynthia together. I'm glad you're all just used to the way my mouth doesn't always work. So thank you for tolerating me. And thank you both for being here and answering some tough questions and providing more information to us on a really important topic. So we're now going to go to item six,

[00:41:23] which is um new business it's actually five my printed agenda is not the same as what is in board docs we're going to follow board docs um because that is what was published to the public and so number five item five is new business and i'd like to take this time to open it up to committee members i'm going to ask jory if you would take notes on this specifically um if you have any suggestions for the new board um whatever this committee looks like moving forward with the new

[00:41:56] board and um topics i'm really looking for topics specific to help generate the next um year of discussion so um if you have something you just i'm just going to ask jory to make a list so if there's something that was burning that we didn't cover you know and since 2019 and it's still burning or if it just came up in the last few weeks or it's just something you wish we had done here in this committee um please just take a minute and then we'll we can go around the room

[00:42:26] just raise your hand and we'll generate a nice list for the next the next board and i was hoping somebody would start go ahead anna i definitely think that we need to be having conversations about how to support our Palestinian students and their right to honor their home country and their freedom to be proud of who they are and to have a safe space in our buildings.

[00:43:06] Erica, your hand was up. Yes, the thought that I was having was that, you know, I have enjoyed being on the equity committee and it is incredibly important work and you hear from public comment um and the frustration of meetings that have to be canceled because we don't make a quorum i would love if moving forward the committee could somehow try to figure out a way that people could have an alternate so that um if someone is out especially if they're going to be out for a sustained period of time or

[00:43:44] something ahead of time like i had surgery and i had a couple of medical issues um i would have loved for someone to have been able to come and take my place um and not just a random person but someone who has been designated as that ahead of time i appreciate that i second that and and the way the um the way this committee is structured and set up that would just be a change in in how the committee structure is and so you can also generate ideas please if you have an idea about um the committee structure itself and how we i know um i've been talking with staff about

[00:44:19] different ways that perhaps wouldn't require a quorum but would have representatives still from a lot of our community stakeholders and our parents everyone that is represented here now and and

still be able to carry on the work without the quorum that has required us to sometimes not be able to meet as a committee so any of those ideas and if you don't have them tonight but you want to generate them please reach out to Shahid or Leticia and and I'm sure that they will pass those along and if it requires a policy change or the which is which this committee is structured

[00:44:59] under they can pass that to the new board members to make those changes okay did somebody Robin was your hand up i have two wish list items one being um to bring back the second language program in elementary schools i think that was really valuable and i would love to see that in more than one school or two schools as a pilot program just have it in all the elementary schools and then secondly talking to some of my teacher friends um i that this might be a budgeting issue but um every teacher has a stipend um but maybe it could be increased for those um title one

[00:45:38] schools or like the like piggybacking on what Robin Burke said about the stronger PTO schools having more opportunities and sort of leveraging that by making that stipend higher in those schools so that they can get what they need instead of relying on the PTO that's not there like some other schools filling in those gaps.

[00:46:05] Thank you. Mark and then Jill. - So I think the meat and potatoes of this committee is to make recommendations to the school board on policy. And we do that, you know, mostly at home online, right?

[00:46:23] We do discuss it, but all of our, all of our comments are done through that online method. I think it would be maybe just speaking for myself, I think it would be really helpful to get feedback from the school board on how those recommendations were used if they weren't used I mean is it going into a void or they're not being considered we don't know or at least I don't know so some feedback I think would be helpful and it might help us to better understand how we can do a better job of providing recommendations to the school board sure so I will answer to my knowledge and my own experience with the feedback that is

[00:47:01] provided to each committee that is reviewing policy and to the board all of the feedback that is received online which I encourage you to keep doing whether you're a member of this committee or not it's open to the public on the website it isn't just emailed to this committee it is open to members of the public as well through the website is that the committees that I've served on when we are reviewing a policy we are able to look at just raw comments from the public about each policy with specific language that a member of the community might want changed

[00:47:39] or a group representing a group of students might want changed. And those are very often brought to the committee. They're brought to the committee very often with recommendations from staff to either implement them or perhaps why we can't for legal reasons.

[00:47:56] And then the committee moves forward and recommends them to the school board. And when they're put before the school board, those recommendations and comments are also available to the school board at large. So I wanted to make sure that you all realize they don't just go into a void. They're collected and presented to the board members on the committee and at the board level.

[00:48:13] So continue to provide those comments. They're really important. They've been very important to me, and I know many of my colleagues really do take a lot of the suggestions and make those policy changes. And I've seen it happen in committee and then, of course, on the dais as well. So if as a committee you'd like to get more feedback on that, And we previously did a lot of policy review in the

committee, and we would sometimes get caught up in verbatim line changes that really have to go to the board.

[00:48:48] And then so many policies came to us for review that there was no way to do them all in committee with the amount of time we had. So that's a balancing, and of course, if the committee prefers to look at policy, that is something that should be brought to the next chair.

[00:49:03] okay but thank you for that feedback I appreciate it Raquel you had your hand up or I said Jill Raquel Robin and okay I'm gonna if I don't call you in the right order I apologize but Jill Raquel Robin Charles a while ago we had started some subcommittees like small groups and I know that we've been a little bit derailed because we have committee members changing and then kind of lack of continuity of people who are regularly attending so hopefully like that would be the start of a start of a solution to this but I thought that that work was really good it was

[00:49:40] really important and I'd love for us to kind of take what we had started way back and kind of get a temperature check on you know what has evolved from that and where we can go to continue some of that work so for those of you who were not here I don't know if we've done that committee have we done that small committee group this year in the very beginning of the year where we had like an HR committee we had committee on like inclusion in the gifted program in the academies we had community outreach types of committees so that we could get like more done during you know not

[00:50:20] focus on one thing as a whole group but have like three or four things going at one time I thought that was a great method and hopefully we can you know become a little bit more consistent with regular membership attending meetings, but I would love to see us return to some of that work.

[00:50:39] Thank you. Raquel? So this is just to kind of, I guess, piggyback off of Mark a little bit with the policies and getting that feedback. I did, I came in later. I was kind of at it a little bit late in the year, but I did enjoy the session where we did review the policy and actually get together as a group to be able to develop that feedback and then listening to you it's something that you guys have done in the past and it just became overwhelming but I guess to you know moving

[00:51:13] forward to kind of get an idea of what that looks like what we submitted what that feedback was but also be able to get together as a group to kind of discuss some of those items and how things have changed or if it's something that we think may need to be revisited so I would just like to be able to do more of that in the future. I think that's great. I really appreciate that feedback.

[00:51:38] Robin? Just to reiterate, I like the suggestion of someone that can represent you if you're unable to be here due to either illness or family circumstance, so support that. Also, if some of you are new or old, several years back, Loudoun County Public Schools was charged with discrimination by the Attorney General's office.

[00:52:01] And there was a set of terms of conciliation. I believe a lot of those items still are outstanding. So that will be one of my requests of the new board is to kind of blow the dust off that document and see where we are and see if we can wrap that up.

[00:52:18] So just looking at one of the last drafts, there's still probably 50% of the items still haven't been addressed. Thanks. Okay, Charles and then Haley. Did I miss anybody? Did I miss you, Tom?

[00:52:33] Okay. Charles, Haley, Tom? Okay. Go ahead. Sorry. So this might be a major change, but I don't know if it's possible. But I think this group is certainly valuable. I think there's a lot of good discussion.

[00:52:50] One of the points that has been hard for me has been there's a lot to talk about, And we seem to come in and talk about topics each month or review policies each month. But I wonder if we could just focus on maybe one or two issues, and that's what we do for that entire term.

[00:53:11] So we choose one, two, maybe three, but we really do focus work on those issues, topics, concerns, and then really make some progress on a few things rather than what seems to be maybe more superficial discussion, but never really getting to any meaningful change on any concern.

[00:53:32] There's a lot out there, so how we choose that is also another discussion. But I wonder if we can just choose to focus on a handful of things and really do deeper work, maybe more meaningful work, than kind of this, not laundry list, but just so many different things that we kind of drive by and really don't really dive into.

[00:53:52] So just a thought that I think could be beneficial. That's great. Thank you. Haley? Charles kind of took the words right out of my mouth. I had the same issue. I was hoping some continuity. My idea was maybe picking a couple of goals, and we could focus the first hour or the second hour, like split it, and then talk about any pressing needs because I know those do come up.

[00:54:19] But maybe that was one of the benefits of the small group is that we could address those throughout the entire year with that group and focus on the same issue every time. And so it had this linear continuity throughout the year.

[00:54:35] I also wanted to mention, Mark, mentioning the policies, which I appreciate, if there could be maybe a deep explanation or deeper, but explanation of exactly the process it goes through at the beginning before people start doing the policies.

[00:54:54] I learned a lot from last year. And when the policies are brought up in the committee, it makes it when we, I know we can't go over all of them, but when we address specific ones, having the group conversation allows my brain to start spinning and hearing other perspectives, allows me to have deeper understanding of the issues and allows me to provide better feedback for certain issues.

[00:55:18] And so that's one of the things I appreciate about having policy discussion within the committee. And so those are the two issues. Thank you. Thank you. That's really great insight as to the process and how you understand things. So I think that that's really important for the next chair to understand as well.

[00:55:37] And I know staff will appreciate having that feedback as well. And I think you made me think of something else, and it has dropped from my brain, but it was about the policy review itself and having that understanding not just of the process but what the policy is entailing and what you're actually giving feedback on.

[00:55:57] And so I think it was along those lines. So I appreciate that feedback as well. Tom? Well, two things. First of all, and I just double-checked my Robert's Rules. I'd like to see us explore, in addition to the idea of the alternate, the possibility of setting a different quorum number, which can be done.

[00:56:16] It doesn't have to be just a simple majority if there is an executive order that the quorum is a different number. So we could use that as a way to address sometimes the difficulty in meeting a quorum.

Second thing is, and I know I had raised the policy thing in the past, but I'm glad to hear a lot of other voices chiming in on that issue.

[00:56:34] I would like to even be more specific about that. I would like this committee to form a subcommittee for policy review and recommendations to be brought to the group, to be voted on among this committee so that a set of recommendations can come from the equity committee itself to the school board.

[00:56:51] I know that that takes a lot of additional work and if we form a subcommittee to focus on that they can do a lot of the heavy lifting when it comes to the wordsmithing and the the actual changes to the draft but then to bring it to the larger committee here so that we could vote on it and then move it forward as a recommendation coming from this committee as a whole rather than a bunch of individual comments. So I just want to comment on why that doesn't happen right now there's several reasons the way the committee is structured right now it is a committee of the school board so it is required by the Sunshine Law's FOIA to meet in public and so we had

[00:57:30] discussed that previously and the committee at the time decided they wanted to meet in the smaller groups during our meeting hours so a subgroup of this committee if it was which it would still be a committee of the board the way it is structured right now would require to be a public meeting as well so just wanted to that may require the board at with your feedback to change the structure of the committee and and how it functions and similar to SEAC and the gifted advisory committees which are advisory committees and they are not committees of the board right that that's the difference

[00:58:08] there right so you can have your subcommittee meeting policies from SEAC and it doesn't have to be an open public meeting and then you bring your recommendations to SEAC that's not the structure of this particular committee as it stands right now but if that's the way you wanted to work that's really important for staff to know so they can bring that information back to the school board and the school board can change the policy that dictates how this committee runs absolutely i just would say for anybody who ever wants to join any of those subcommittee meetings the subcommittee meetings on seac actually are publicly announced as well now so anybody from the public can join those meetings as well absolutely we would want to do that for this

[00:58:47] i'm sure yeah right so i mean i appreciate all of this conversation this is really great and it's great for the new school board to understand how the members who have been actively participating this year really want to move forward and and and be a part of it still robin i think like jill was mentioning that that's kind of what we had in place so um there was a ton of equity issues so we spent maybe two or three meetings prioritizing those issues and then we divided the higher priority issues into subgroups so there was a subcommittee just based on policy and procedure

[00:59:23] if i understand that correctly and it was working quite well so but it met during our committee time i just want to be clear that it was it because three of you make up um the three members of this committee meeting together has to be done in public so two of us can have a conversation it you know it goes to why we instruct everybody at the beginning of the year with our council as to the communication that happens as voting members of this committee.

[00:59:52] And then as far as establishing a quorum, I was a little concerned while if we don't establish a quorum that we don't meet at all. So many organizations that I'm a part of, we have to establish a quorum if there's voting items, but it doesn't permit us from meeting and having discussion.

[01:00:11] So are rules different within LCPS or just a question? I asked this many years ago and um council did advise that we would have to have a quorum in order to start the committee which is true of other school board committees as well so yes absolutely otherwise we would have been doing that right along nobody's more disappointed when there's not a quorum than me I just want everyone to understand because it isn't just about the work it's also because we have staff here the room gets set up we have people in the booth broadcasting live to our community because that's how we set this up we thought the work was so important when we

[01:00:47] first started as you're aware robin that um we wanted the community be able to watch the meetings um at home so absolutely that all goes hand in hand so do we have any other items we would like to add to our list i'm assuming jory's been typing over there for me thank you and i know cynthia and laura have been taking notes as well all right any other new business that didn't qualify under that. I didn't mean to. Go ahead, Erica. If I could, I just wanted to take a very

[01:01:21] quick moment and say that I also support any Palestinian students being able to protest as they need to. I also support Sudanese students being able to protest what's going on in their country, or Uyghurs, what's going on in their country, or Ukrainians, or the very small and Loudoun County Jewish population of students. What I think is important for folks to remember is just as we are trying to create educated citizens as far as social-emotional intelligence

[01:01:59] is concerned, and as far as academic intelligence is concerned, there is also a level of intelligence for engaging in very hotbed issues and one thing I think we have to be very aware of I don't think there's anyone in this room that would deny the fact that when it's announced that there's a quote walkout a good portion of the kids who are doing the walkout have no idea what they're walking out for they're just looking for an opportunity to get out of class I think also in the idea of educating, like educating principals and administration so that they're aware of Muslim

[01:02:39] practices so that they respect the needs of students and staff in the school so that they have the space and time that they need for their prayer. I think education is important as far as if we are going to allow groups or organize demonstrations in schools, especially ones that interrupt education. I think that mindfulness and education, both around the issues at hand, to the best of the ability, and certainly any flags, slogans, or chants that students might use,

[01:03:18] I think it's important that there is understanding, because as a Jewish person, I can say, some people are often surprised, and I'll tell you a very, very quick story. I was in this amazing Indian grocery store recently, and I was with a friend of mine, and she was not aware that what is called the swastika, which actually by Germans was called, and I can't say it in German, but it's called the Hooked Cross, so it was not actually called a swastika by the Germans. It is a symbol

[01:03:52] that is the complete opposite of all things that the Nazi regime represented. It's a spiritual symbol it's a symbol for um prosperity and joy and it's used in a lot of hindu faiths and many other many other faiths around the world but if you just hold that up as my friend saw when she turned the corner and there was a display on the end cap of all these beautiful pieces of artwork that had what she you know was trained to have a guttural response to there was there were swastikas

[01:04:26] all over and i had to explain to her what they were i think if there are slogans that are um potentially confrontational that it's important that all parties be aware of that before students protest thank you is there any other new business all right seeing none i'm going to thank everyone for being here

tonight i'm going to thank you for your service on this committee and we are adjourned have a good evening



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