

Virtual Governance Sub-Committee Report
Wednesday, February 24, 2021
Broadcast from the Media Arts Studio
454 Broadway, Cambridge, MA

Called for the purpose of continuing to discuss the code of ethics of the School Committee. It is anticipated that this meeting will last no longer than 6:30 p.m.

Members Present: Member Rojas, Chair; Member Wilson; Member Weinstein

Also Present: Maureen MacFarlane, Legal Counsel, Chandra Banks, Conflict Mediator and Rowan Marcus, IT; Noelani Gabriel, Community Charter School of Cambridge; Leonard Russ, Community Charter School of Cambridge, and Racheal Jean Louis, Community Charter School of Cambridge; Jenny Chung, Educator and Parent; Eva Valenzuela, parent; Sarah Rosenberg, Educator and parent; Glenn Koocher, President Mass Association of School Committees

Chair Rojas began the meeting at 5:00pm with reading the notice to participate as well as going over the agenda:

Goals:

- Review the recommended changes to the code of ethics of the School Committee and consider bringing back to the School Committee for adoption.
- Provide opportunity for community members to ask questions and/or share concerns and ideas on this topic.

Welcome and Agenda Overview

- Give context around the meeting: Review the proposed changes to the code of ethics of the School Committee. When last presented to the School Committee, it was referred back to the subcommittee.
- Public comment will be framed as a Q&A

Review topics to discuss and some frequently asked questions

- Review suggested changes to the code of ethics of the School Committee in the context of considering adding restorative justice practices. The aim is for the code of ethics to not only talk about what is expected from committee members, but also how to respond when a school committee member's actions fall short of those expectations.
- When the recommendation was heard at the last school committee meeting, it was referred back to the subcommittee for further review. It was suggested that Glenn Koocher of the MASC could provide feedback on possible unintended consequences. Some School Committee members voiced concerns about being tied in reviewing constant complaints/accusations against school committee members.

The meeting then proceeded with introductions of participants.

Member-Rojas provided a recap and updated the participants with what the code of ethics document looked like and went through the revisions step by step.

Member Weinstein followed up with a detailed summary of some of the concerns that were raised in the initial document and how it is reflected in the document today.

Member Wilson added that the process of change is difficult and adding amendments to this document is one portion to this meeting however we are looking at an understanding to the restorative justice piece and how do we diffuse potential challenging situations.

Chandra Banks reflected on Restorative Justice and remarked that is not supposed to be on based on the tools but on the values.

Chair Rojas clarified the complaint procedure and went over the concerns raised.

Glenn Koocher is not familiar with the present policy however he is familiar with the model that the document is based on in Cape Cod.

Maureen MacFarlane added that she has suggested changes to the current revised document and proceeded to go through the them line by line.

Glenn Koocher is in favor of the revised changes from Maureen MacFarlane and pointed out that there needs to be a definition of restorative justice. Also cautioned not to interfere with the members right to dissent. There is wide latitude to issuing a complaint and the right of free speech is not compromise. Member's right to speak freely and confidentially with their constituency. Mentioning that the School Committee should rely on their legal counsel for guidance. An example could be "one person's passionate advocacy could be one person's offensive language.

Member Rojas will circulate the red lined changes from Maureen MacFarlane to the participants.

Glenn Koocher spoke again and conversation came back to the Cape Cod version of their policy and Mr. Koocher found flaws it as well. Asked can this policy be used to embarrass elected officials, and used the example of withholding pertinent information. He then itemized specifics from the document.

- Member Wilson gave context to Mr. Koocher with retelling an incident from 2019 and how it was handled. Spoke of the investigation process and its outcome caused more harm. The restorative justice process could have been used to help with the healing from this incident. She then proceeds to introduce the Members of the Community Charter School to speak on Restorative Justice.

Noelani Gabriel, Community Charter School of Cambridge echoed what Chandra Banks said as well, noting it's not about tools and strategies it is about values and philosophies. Defined by Fania Davis, she went into the meaning and definition and explained it as, a relational practice that brings together people who are affected by wrong doing, to address need and responsibilities and heal harm to relationship and community.

Leonard Russ, Community Charter School of Cambridge began his thoughts that there needed to be restorative leaders who will hold, promote and explain the Restorative Justice purpose and philosophy. Restorative Justice tenets are Community, Accountability, Trust and Interconnectedness. Implementation is a multiyear process.

Racheal Jean Louis, Community Charter School of Cambridge, spoke of their experience with Restorative Justice at their school and its many facets and its circles of instances where conflicts and challenges were resolved. There is a constant rebuilding of connections and values. Questions the committee on why not spend time on healing and what is the worst that can happen?

Leonard Russ followed up with If you really want to dismantle white supremacy culture, Restorative Justice is the philosophy.

Noelani Gabriel followed up as well, it is a process of people not about rules and policies. The foundation is about trust.

Chandra Banks commended the Community Charter School of Cambridge for their hard work and all they have done to implement the Restorative Justice process.

Chair Rojas asked how has Restorative Justice been implemented at Community Charter School? Does the School Committee have stated values?

- Chandra Banks answered that there are not defined values and they are not clear. There needs to be a conversation about what are the District's values.
- Leonard Russ answered that the head of their school is part of the leadership team that implemented the Restorative Justice philosophy. Urges the participants to go through the Restorative Process.

Chandra Banks reflected on the process of listing values and its parallel to a complaint. Values need to be established in order to screen the Restorative Justice process. Speaks to the process and its importance and that it is a time consuming.

Member Wilson reflected on how hard change is and the unknown. There has to be a starting point. Considers a future motion on sitting in a circle and doing the work. Put the work into the understating and appreciating what this process is.

Chair Rojas spoke on the working towards something to present to the School Committee with consideration to what was brought up. Do we need a description to what Restorative Justice is?

Glenn Koocher speculated that the lay reader, student, teacher and parents may not understand what is Restorative Justice is? A definition would be useful.

Member Weinstein agreed and built on what Mr. Koocher was saying. Clarity as to the needs to addressed and the process is relevant as well.

Jenny Chung shared her thoughts about freedom of speech and "the liberty to swings one's arms ends just where one's nose begins." Brought up power dynamics and when harm is caused it has to be addressed.

Member Weinstein wanted clarity to some of the concerns that were raised. There are complaints and concerns regardless of the policy. Not having a clear policy to address leaves those concerns and harms unaddressed

Chandra Banks explained her previous training and wants to have people trained with enough resources and by people who are thorough in the understanding with what Circle Training is and its process is. Went on to discuss in detail how it could work and the limits put on by the district. Specifies the individuality of trainings and its uniqueness.

Member Wilson reflected on the constant abuse delivered to staff, leadership and student. There needs to be a starting point for this process. Brings up the benefits of a late motion. Or Vote on the revised Code of Ethics.

Chair Rojas reviews next steps; incorporate revisions proposed by Maureen MacFarlane and trainings on Restorative Justice

Adjourned 6:24pm

Attest:

Jennifer Dever Wood
Cambridge School Committee