

BOARD MEETING MINUTES

September 14, 2021

Call to Order

President Jernigan called the Study Session of the Shoreline Board of Directors to order in the Shoreline Room of the Administrative Offices at the Shoreline Center at 6:00 p.m. on September 14, 2021. This meeting was also available to the community via Zoom.

Roll Call

Present: Meghan Jernigan, President; Rebeca Rivera, Vice President; Sara Betnel, Member; Sarah Cohen, Member; Emily Williams, Member (*via Zoom*); and Sky Stark, Shorecrest Student Representative. (Absent: Yubi Mamiya, Shorewood Student Representative)

President Jernigan announced that over the course of the last two years, board members have heard and talked a lot about the District's equity tool. The Board is very eager to understand how this tool was conceived and how it is meant to be used and applied to all of the decisions that come before the Board moving forward.

The following topic was discussed:

Race and Equity Impact Decision-Making Tool Training

Dr. Tanisha Brandon-Felder, Director of Equity and Family Engagement, presented.

Dr. Brandon-Felder began by showing the following image of a Dove soap print ad from 2019.



This ad created a lot of controversy and people had very strong reactions to it. There are implications as to what this meant. This ad has been used in the District's equity trainings where questions were asked of participants: What do you see? What are some things that you are noticing about this image? What about this image could be considered offensive? Was it problematic or questionable? It was about the idea that something was dirty, not clean, doesn't belong and that something else was cleaner or more pure. But the real question revolved around the how this came about and who allowed this to happen. Dove sent out the following message: *"An image we recently posted on Facebook missed the mark in representing women of color thoughtfully. We deeply regret the offense it caused."*

How many times have we seen similar ads where there is something questionable, problematic, stereotypical, offensive and is shortly followed by a recapture or an apology saying "we didn't realize" or "something was missed". The real question becomes, how was the decision made, who was a part of the conversation and whose perspectives were considered. This is what began the idea of having a systemic process that would help us to be intentional about making decisions.

Crafting and creating the race and equity policy was an 18-month process that involved a large number of stakeholders that included students, families and communities. Part of the language and part of the mission was to also implement a decision-making tool, which became part of a parallel process. As the committee researched various district and state policies, there was a pattern of having an accompanying decision-making tool. In looking for examples from across the country and across the more local region, it was learned that people were using their tool as guidance in slowing down and being much more deliberate in determining not only the decisions that were being made but also who was part of the decision making.

Shoreline's race and equity policy was adopted by the Board in June 2017. In December 2017, the Equity Advisory Team, which was a much smaller subset of the original committee, drafted the tool. The tool was drafted from a variety of resources, adapted and fine-tuned to meet the needs of Shoreline specifically. It was tried out in different areas with different groups, including administrators in order to get feedback; the first training of the tool was done with Management Council in March 2018.

The tool came from the language in the equity in systems and operations portion of the race and equity policy—develop and strategically use a race and equity decision-making tool. "The purpose of this tool is to engage everyone involved in Shoreline Schools to learn, think and address how race and equity impacts choices in instruction, programming, staffing, funding and policy. *All members of the Shoreline Schools community should strive to improve their anti-racist practices and equity awareness through all of our activities and choices.* To ensure equity is always considered this tool should be used for any major systems-level decisions regardless of perception of personal values presented." Dr. Brandon-Felder commented on the sentence in italics above. At the time of its inception, three and a half years ago, using the term anti-racist seemed monumental but it's use was intentional because the aspiration involves moving towards thinking unapologetically about how we are checking and balancing our work around anti-racism and creating racially equitable outcomes.

There are four sections of the tool:

Before the Decision

Section A: Pause and examine YOU – Who are you? (as an individual and as a decision making team) Who is involved in making a decision? Who is at the table right now making the decision? What is your racial composition? This should be proportionate to the number of students being served.

Section B: Who is affected? What is the racial composition of the impacted groups? Who is affected? This includes power dynamics and positionality. If there is a power that exists around the racial groups or the perception of how the power plays out, it could have a very harmful impact on the most marginalized groups, those on whose behalf the decision is being made. Additionally, if there aren't people who are representative of those who are going to be most impacted by the decisions, it creates inequity by itself. Having people who are empowered to use their voice and their decision-making ability in the decision that directly impacts them is vital in this process.

Section C: What are the impacts? How will the decision of this group advance equity in our system? Ultimately, the goal is to create an equitable outcome. It doesn't mean that's always going to be the case even with an equitable intent, but having the equitable process actually increases the likelihood of having an equitable outcome.

After the implementation of the decision: Reflection

Section D: What do you think happened? Did you succeed in advancing equity? To what degree? How do you know? There should be evidence. This can be used across different kinds of decisions—from what books we are choosing for our classroom to how we are deciding on the “really big issues” that impact all of us.

Dr. Brandon-Felder shared a recent example of using the tool to make an equitable decision. It was related to updating the District's gender inclusive registration form, which is used specifically when students are thinking about their own individual identities and wanting to be recognized and affirmed for who they are. It is a form that the students initiate; it was outdated and not truly reflecting who the students are. As the person given this task, her process included the following steps:

- 1) Who am I and what do I know about this topic?
- 2) What resources do I have?
- 3) Who else do I know around me that can help with this task?
- 4) She did research, went to different organizations and people
- 5) Shared with counselors, administrators, teachers
- 6) Her daughter told her to talk to students so she went to families (including those who have been supportive of the LGBTQ potlucks)

In terms of impacts, the goal was for a wider sense of identity affirmation in our district so that students see themselves reflected in the way they want to see themselves. This can be transferred to our educators and our systems while also allowing the adults in the system to understand how best to be thinking about this process. Once this process is fully implemented, Dr. Brandon-Felder will engage in the reflection portion of the tool by communicating with the people who are actually using the forms in order to ensure that their needs are being met.

The tool has been used in the District Instructional Materials Committee (DIMC) as well as other committees across the district. It's been used in conversations with our family advocates group, deans group, equity leads, to name a few. Dr. Brandon-Felder shared the race and equity decision-making tool handout (attached to these minutes) as well as the handy bookmark, which can be used for quick reference. The ultimate goal, however, is to internalize the process so we don't need the visual indicator all the time.

President Jernigan commented that it was clear to her from reading through the various sections, that you can't just use the tool, make a decision and then walk away. There's a responsibility to evaluate the impact and to assess whether or not the intended impact was achieved; the accountability piece is critical. She asked about what kind of timeline there should be for a tool like this as she imagined

it involves multiple conversations and revisiting over time. In response, Dr. Brandon-Felder again referred to the items listed on the tool handout, noting that just gathering the team could take a couple of weeks or a month. Attaining the most powerful and equitable outcome and impact goes hand in hand with a really strong start. At times, groups have discovered they weren't getting what they needed so they went back and reformed the group. Determining a specific timeline would depend on the decision and the scope of the decision and who was impacted. At times, the process involves reaching out to communities or families that aren't necessarily in the internal circle, which may equate to more time. To be truly inclusive, there is no real set time because the desired outcome is to have enough people to have an informed conversation that leads to asking the important questions.

President Jernigan expressed her appreciation for the response and reported that this would be very helpful to the Board in their decision-making process and in ensuring that all impacted groups are heard.

Director Rivera also expressed appreciation for the process and was heartened to hear about reaching out to families as well as the occasional need to reform the groups. She asked if a lot of folks using the tool think in terms of who best to reach out to in the community for feedback. Dr. Brandon-Felder replied that is the piece around who is present at the table from the beginning. In her own experience with the gender inclusive form, she even reached out to her family to get more information. However, part of it is still quite subjective—it's still just paper and words. Having a reflective, representative group on the DIMC committee last year made a world of difference in terms of what types of materials were moved through for adoption. People were able to speak directly to the content of those materials and there were personal lived experiences that were shared. We could have totally missed that if there hadn't been individuals saying, "wait, what about this particular representation or perspective?" There is an educational awareness that takes place outside of the tool.

In regard to the Section C question, "How will the decision of this group advance equity in our system, President Jernigan asked if there were times when decisions don't advance equity and if so, how is that managed while working through the tool? Dr. Brandon-Felder responded that sometimes the structures that are already in place don't allow for the desired equitable outcome. So then the question becomes what about the system needs to be shifted in order to create that equitable outcome, which may involve eliminating barriers along the way.

Director Betnel commented on the return to school plan that was approved by the Board last spring and submitted to OSPI. This decision making tool was offered in the plan in response to the question about what districts have to offer to the larger community. OSPI is now recommending Shoreline's tool to other school district as an example to follow. For future consideration, Director Betnel asked how providing the diversity make-up of those serving on various committees could become more normalized in the information brought to the Board for decision making.

Director Rivera asked if the tool was a requirement for groups making decisions. Dr. Brandon-Felder responded that it was not a mandate or a requirement but the actual language is starting to be used throughout district documents, e.g., school improvement plans (SIP). Groups are strongly recommended and encouraged to use the tool. This tool has likely been used more in the last year than it had been since its inception. In talking to other districts, it has been said that policies and tools are created all the time but it's how we actually make them live and breathe that's the most important. "The more we talk about it, the more we bring it up and put it into documents that are being used and that are required, the more it becomes normalized." President Jernigan added that "any decision we make necessitates these questions so there really is no decision that we're making within the District

and the confines of the Board that is too small or too isolated—it should be used consistently and strategically.”

Director Betnel requested that when system barriers are identifiable, those be shared with the Board where appropriate because systemic issues are often connected to policy or legislation which the Board may intersect with and have an opportunity to visit, discuss and possibly eliminate those barriers.

Director Rivera shared that she was excited to think about how Section D might be utilized in considering the racial equity tool itself as a board and think about areas that may need improvement—using the tool to evaluate the tool. President Jernigan asked if we had a complete assessment of how the tool has been used and its impacts. Dr. Brandon-Felder replied that during the back to school days in August, intentional conversations were held with staff and there were some staff members who had never heard of the tool. So it’s a matter of making it accessible and widely transparent. That question might be better answered at the end of this school year. Currently, we are in a time of making many decisions and there seems to be an intentional focus on using the tool mechanism because it allows for some protection around intentionality and integrity of how we’re engaging in the process. Given all the trauma that has taken place, the stakes around equitable accountability are even higher than they were as recent as two years ago.

Director Cohen asked if the tool assumed a specific definition for advancing equity or is that something that is part of the participatory process with the impacted groups to determine what it looks like in a specific situation. Yes, it’s very much connected to the decision being made and who is impacted by it. The impacts of different marginalization of different oppressions could be very different depending on who’s connected to it, e.g., conversations about ability will land differently than conversations about gender. Director Cohen further asked if there had been examples of groups using the tool and coming to disagreements about the question or having to work through that as part of the process. Dr. Brandon-Felder responded not really because there is typically data at the beginning to support what’s being asked and that supports the subsequent decision. Tracking of progress occurs along the way rather than at the end and then Section D becomes a celebration. It’s a process of transformation and recognizing where a system is not meeting the needs of those it is serving.

Director Williams asked if Dr. Brandon-Felder had seen other districts, either locally or across the world, using a tool like this one that has some sort of accountability in place that would be good for our school district. Our tool was partially adapted by a couple of nonprofit organizations as well as Seattle School District. One of the things that was pretty common in doing research for Shoreline’s policy was that there was always some sort of metrics—a chart, a rubric. With systemic obstacles, the only accountability we have is each other. We have to be accountable to each other so that we can have enough trust to be able to investigate our systems. The most important accountability is the outcome of how we are serving and benefiting our students. As far as accountability, people much more often relate what they were able to accomplish from using the tool. There are various examples of this from different parts of the country, e.g. Harlem, where an intentional system (children’s zones) was built over a number of blocks in Harlem resulting in benefits to everything from births to college entrance. There may or may not have been a specific tool to accomplish these benefits but there was definitely an intentional process.

President Jernigan mentioned that one measure of accountability might include knowing how many staff have interacted with this tool and received training on it. Dr. Brandon-Felder reported that the first equity lead professional development session was scheduled for the following week and the topic

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would be training on the race and equity decision-making tool, so within a couple of months we may have an answer to that question.

Representative Stark asked if there was an efficient manner in which this training could be taught to student leaders at the high schools. Dr. Brandon-Felder responded she would love to participate in that training. Currently, there are two equity leads at each high school; she would be happy to facilitate conversations on that topic.

Dr. Reyes shared that this work was what brought her to Shoreline. It impacted her personally and professionally. We've been talking about equity for years, but this type of work is difficult with the systems we live within. She is proud to be a part of a district that is engaging in this work and has come so far. As was brought out this week in her State Board of Education meetings, change takes a long time, but over the last three to five years, we've seen some incredible gains in this direction that we hadn't seen over years and years of trying to make these changes. We have a great opportunity to continue to support the effort and engage in it as learners. She congratulated the team for their incredible work.

Adjournment: 6:50 p.m.

Meghan Jernigan, School Board President

Attest: October 19, 2021

Dr. Susana Reyes, Secretary to Board of Directors