The meeting was called to order at 7:11 PM. Those present included Committee Chair Matt Kelley, Vice Chair Melissa Martin, Secretary Linda Chow and member Sharon Gray; Superintendent David Lussier, Assistant Superintendents Joan Dabrowski and Cindy Mahr; METCO Director Doreen Ward, METCO Coordinator (WMS, Hardy and Sprague) Cynthia Russell and METCO Coordinator (WHS, Upham and Fiske) Grant Hightower. Absent: Jim Roberti.

Welcome:
Ms. Ward thanked everyone for attending and, after introducing herself, the METCO Parent Council leaders as well as the METCO coordinators who were in attendance, she asked the Administration and School Committee to introduce themselves.

Discussion:
Dr. Lussier began his remarks by talking about the recent incident at Wellesley High where an African-American teacher received an anonymous email containing racist and inappropriate content. Educators and students have rallied to show their support for this WHS teacher. He also referenced the prior incident involving cyberbullying which led to the hiring of the Kingston Bay Group (KBG) to conduct a Race and Diversity Climate Assessment of WPS. Based on KBG’s findings and recommendations, the Administration has proposed adding a Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (D, E & I) to the FY20 school budget.

Following Dr. Lussier’s opening remarks, Ms. Ward invited METCO parents to ask questions and to share their experiences. A number of key themes emerged:

- In response to a question as to what protocols are in place for handling incidents such as the ones described, Dr. Lussier talked about the increased training of staff through HR, a greater focus on making sure diversity and race are present in curriculum, and consistent communications. At WHS, students have rallied and rejected what happened. It was noted that the Director of D, E & I position that’s in the FY20 budget request, while not a panacea, should greatly benefit the entire WPS community.

- A couple parents shared observations about the curriculum and expressed concerns around cultural competency of some staff. Dr. Dabrowski described the process underway for developing tools to review all curriculum, as well as the cultural competency training in progress for educators and administrators, to be followed by training for paraprofessionals, cafeteria workers, and bus drivers.
• Several parents and a student noted how challenging it can be for METCO students to participate on athletic teams. There appears to be a lack of sensitivity on the part of some coaches to the demands facing students who have to not only balance their coursework with practices and games, but also allow time for commuting to/from home. This plays out in several ways – kids are benched because of what is perceived to be a lack of commitment (having to miss practice from time to time) or they walk away because the coach does not think they are familiar with the sport’s fundamentals (not having the opportunity to participate in town sports on weekends).

• Many attendees emphasized the need for more courageous conversations, at the same time recognizing how challenging it is for METCO students to find their voice in a predominantly white community. The Administration noted that this work has started but is probably not moving at the speed most would like to see. This calls for:
  o Creating an environment at all grade levels in which METCO students feel safe to raise concerns
  o Encouraging more of a two-way dialogue – e.g., if 2 students of different races have an issue, they should be able to have a conversation
    ▪ could race be a seminar topic on Seminar Day?
    ▪ Mr. Hightower shared how white students are being asked to confront the perceptions and reality of this town
  o Changing the nature of the conversations when talking about METCO students – they are currently viewed as “separate” rather than part of the community.
    ▪ A parent questioned how “real” can conversations be when she has not seen anything on the walls at her child’s school which says “inclusion” to her
    ▪ Mr. Kelley noted how many adults do not like to risk saying something wrong, so often do not say anything at all
  o Building in more empathy, acceptance, and respect for human differences into the curriculum and school culture – students should learn how to live respectfully with one another, and this should start at the elementary level

• Dr. Lussier acknowledged how promoting greater inclusion remains a challenge esp. given METCO’s origins as a desegregation program to bring 2 communities together – a key focus for the proposed Director of D, E & I position will be on fostering more inclusion, starting with helping adults to do this better. Some key points of discussion were as follows:
  o having a point person responsible for diversity and inclusion is so important; not filling the D, E & I Director role would send a negative message
  o no METCO Elementary coordinator is a problem
  o Boston Public Schools is grappling with similar issues – glad to hear what WPS is doing; would love to see more “naming of” the issue, more proactive work on civil rights, and expanding on what is taught in classroom
  o suggestions were made on how to strengthen the relationship between Boston and Wellesley families outside school – METCO parents have a role, e.g., invite Wellesley students to playdates/parties; their parents can always say ‘yes’ or ‘no’
• There were a number of questions and comments raised about diversity as well:
  o Diversity refers not only to race, but also to learning styles as well as non-traditional families –
    ▪ students need to feel accepted overall; teachers can sometimes talk above students and do not always support different learning styles
    ▪ the tool used for School Directories does not allow for selecting 2 dads or 2 moms – this concern will be passed along to the PTOs
  o There appear to be a lot of math coaches, ELL coaches, etc., but what about diversity coaches?
  o With incidents happening over and over again, what about tracking infractions?
  o Are observers / supervisors providing feedback on curriculum to make it more impactful?
  o Where do the Schools anticipate being with diversity of staff in 3 – 5 years? The hiring goal is 20% educators of color each year

Parents commended the Schools on some of the initiatives already in place, including the math workshops and affinity breakfasts, and expressed appreciation for this meeting, the candid conversation, and the Administration and Committee’s support for a Director of D, E & I position in the budget:
• Math workshops for parents have been excellent; the instructors are engaging
• Affinity breakfasts at the elementary schools are great –
  o A parent talked about how excited her kids get about the breakfasts which are held every other week at Hardy
  o Some questions arose whether these are happening at all elementary schools
• It was noted that the honesty about “fear of saying something wrong” was well-received and respected, and that the outcome would be worse if stuff left unsaid
• Mr. Kelley noted how School Committee is always fighting for resources and is in full support of the Director of D, E & I position
• Another person stressed the importance of an environment that reflects positively on everyone’s identity, including that of black and brown students – she described what she had to go through to make sure the METCO banner is always on display, and reinforced the importance for the entire staff to be culturally competent

Some of the next steps that were identified included the following:
• Ms. Ward suggested holding another meeting with an agenda that starts with “courageous conversations” as a topic
• Ms. Ward will work on bringing “Parent University” workshops to Boston and on improving communications so more parents are aware of upcoming workshops and any future opportunities for parent engagement, e.g., focus group discussions
• Ms. Rochelle encouraged parents to consider attending School Committee meetings in Wellesley
ADJOURNMENT
At approximately 9:00 PM, upon a motion made by Ms. Gray and seconded by Ms. Martin, the Committee unanimously VOTED to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Chow
Secretary

Documents and Exhibits Used:
Agenda for March 7, 2019 School Committee Meeting