Date: 09/01/21  
Time: 6:00-8:00PM  
Location: Zoom  

In Attendance:
Paras Bassuk, Dasia Taylor, Charlie Eastham, JP Claussen, Ty Cruse, Brian Brandsmeier, Laura Gray, Eric Howard, Andrea Jayne, Reyna Roach, Lulu Roarick, Jessie Herper, Caroline Barker, Aala Basheir, Rebecca Michaeli,

Guests: Janet Abejo-Perker, Jean Jordison, Theresa Biancheri, Carmen Gwenigale  

Agenda  

I. Check-In (5 minutes)  
   a. Review and Approve Minutes  
   b. Caroline motioned to approve, lulu seconded motion passed  
   c. Updates from committee members  

II. Equity Department Update  
   a. Janet Abejo-Parker, Ombudsperson  
      i. Hired as of August 2nd. Has a background in psychology, human resources, and law. Before this role, she worked at the Cedar Rapids Human Rights Commission and is trained in restorative justice peace circles.  
      ii. Ombudsperson – Looks forward to serving all district constituents. There are 4 guiding principles to any ombuds role  
         1. Independence – This should be seen as a 3rd party, neutral, separated, and outside the district. Is not a part of any other department, and does not represent the district.  
         2. Neutrality - When someone comes to her, she will not take sides in any complaints, and will review all evidence without bias  
         3. Confidentiality – Not required to share any information that is shared with her unless there is a concern for safety or as required by law. Anytime someone comes to her, the information remains confidential unless permitted to share.  
         4. Informality – There are already processes and procedures in place at the district, and the ombuds office is seen as a supplemental and additional resource in addition to these
procedures that are in place. The role is meant to be a resource for information and referral, a safe place to discuss options and make informed decisions to move forwards, and a place to make recommendations for positive change.

iii. Currently in the process of creating a formal charter for the role, a webpage for the position, and marketing materials. This will then be rolled out to all district constituents at all levels.

iv. Can be reached at ombuds@iowacitschools.org (319) 688-1312

v. Feedback/Comments/Questions

1. JP – How common is an ombuds role in a K-12 District?
   a. Answer: Janet – Has done research on other districts that have this role. There are 25-30 districts listed with this role. Some of these districts created the role and then eliminated the position. There are no other districts in the state of Iowa that have this role.

2. Reyna – Can you elaborate on what all-district constituents means?
   a. Answer: Janet – Anyone who is affiliated with the district or is impacted by school district issues in any way. Employees, teachers, staff, students, parents, families, community members. Our approach is a wholistic lens.

3. Paras – Could you walk us through an example or procedural steps if a student came to you with a complaint of discrimination or harassment in the classroom.
   a. Answer: Janet – If a student comes to me and experienced some sort of discrimination, first that individual’s options are to follow the current processes, whether that’s to go to Eric or Laura. If they are comfortable doing that, then this would be encouraged as an option. But if they would like to go straight to the Ombuds, they can then share their experience and feelings about the situation. Janet will then gather the information and the second step would be discussing what the options would be for that individual. These options could be going to Eric and Laura, facilitation of opening communication, or other various options to address the situation. The person will be given time to consider options and will have a safe place to talk about all the ways a situation can be addressed. Will
then help that person navigate the processes and procedures for whatever they choose to do.
   i. This could mean filing a formal complaint or even filing outside the district with the IC Human Rights Commission.
   b. This will be handled on a case-by-case basis and what the individual is comfortable with.

4. Paras – Do you plan to go into the schools to introduce yourself? You mentioned a website and marketing, what will you be doing?
   a. **Answer:** Janet – Has been meeting with district personnel, and will be meeting with school board members, Will then move to a school level starting with principals and then to parents and parent organizations (DPO). Will then move on to the student organizations and student groups at each school.
   b. Paras – Will send some suggestions and schedule a meeting.

5. Charlie – How will you ask the district to define the ombuds person’s role with law enforcement, and with care assessment teams?
   a. **Answer:** Janet – Will look into this more and did meet with another ombudsperson from the Frederick County Public Schools and they recommended meeting with Law Enforcement to discuss the scope of the role. Would love to talk more about this.
   b. Paras – We’ve had a discussion in this committee regarding the risk of mediation of students and police, and the unavoidable harm.

b. Additional Department Updates
   i. Laura – A quick overview of the new things happening in the department.
      1. L.E.A.D Project Director – A new position in the department that will be led by Fred Newell, he has worked at City High in the past and has now been hired to do mentorship programs at the elementary level to specifically work with black and brown students. He will be working with teachers at a few elementary schools.
      2. The department is working to streamline and systematize things such as develop a protocol for re-entry and work on
having inclusive welcoming school environments at entry points.

3. **Equity Ambassadors** – Because we have a limited amount of PD time available, it is not conducive for real effective learning, so these teams of Equity Ambassadors will dominate differentiated professional development for educators. Teachers who are at a level where they want to do anti-racism training can get this, and those that are at a level where they want more training on cultural humility can get this as well.

### ii. Feedback/Questions

1. Caroline – West has a program called MVP, is this connected to the Equity department? It is circle based
   
   a. **Answer:** Laura – No, this is under student services so Lora Daily’s team has taken lead. Coreen Frank is over this. It has been suggested that the class be formatted for restorative circles. Does not know the status of this.

   b. Caroline – The class part of MVP is that upperclassmen will go in and have circles, but what felt weird was that there was training done in the summer that focused on sexual assault, and it was not done well, and triggered a lot of people and was harmful. The program is led by older white men who did not seem to have the life experience to teach the training.

   i. Laura – This program was funded through a grant, but if the execution of the program was harmful, this needs to be talked about.

### III. Elections

a. Paras – We’ve talked about whether we want to add more people to this committee as we are fairly large.

   i. Lulu – Would like to prioritize getting representation from the 4 high schools before other parents or community members.

   ii. JP – Has been approached by someone from the Chinese American community and would love to have more involvement from this population.

   iii. Laura – Shouldn’t think of this as an either-or, because we do have the student sub-committee piece, and we can ensure that there is representation there. Doesn’t want anyone to think that if we have more community members they are taking away student spots. We want a diverse committee, and getting more is probably the best
way to go rather than less. We will just need to be very right around the agenda and check-in. Also having a balance of voice so there is not too much student vs. adult voice or the opposite.

iv. Ty – There are still a few of us on the committee whose terms are set to expire at the end of the calendar year, I believe. So we should take that into consideration as well.

v. Dasia – JP, can you send information about the Chinese American Association and the contact that you made?
   1. **Answer:** JP - Yes

vi. Paras – We should not be characterizing a demographic group’s lack of involvement on a perceived characteristic of that group, but rather that we as a district should be reaching out to this group.

vii. Janet – Do you do interviews with applicants to follow up with their applications?
   1. **Answer:** Paras – No, we haven’t.
   2. **Answer:** Andrea – The committee asks applicants to go to 1 or 2 meetings before the committee votes on their applications.
   3. Janet – Has found in previous work that having an interview process works well and has made a big difference for getting quality and engaged members.

viii. Lulu – Would like applicants that are more representative of the district.
   1. **Answer:** Andrea – We will need to do targeted recruitment if you want to reach certain populations.

ix. Paras – Would like to add Membership Outreach to our next agenda and would like to form a subcommittee to work on this.

x. Eric – would be cautious about turning people away who want to do this work. We also lost 4 adults from the committee last month, so unless we have a really good reason to turn someone away, we should consider people to apply.
   1. Laura – There is also diversity within diversity, so stereotypically they might fit what we think of a group but in reality, their viewpoint may be much different.

xi. Brian – Could we possibly table the vote to have a more robust conversation about this? Everyone has different perspectives on this which is fantastic and valuable.
   1. **Answer:** Paras – Would agree with Brian. Laura and Janet have brought up the procedural aspect of this, and whether we are getting a good enough picture of people.
2. Dasia – Should table the voting and set up meetings with Joni and Theresa to try to get a more wholistic view of their perspectives. Could we add an interview process to the agenda next month?

3. Paras – Would entertain a motion to table the vote.
   a. Reyna motion to table vote, Brian seconded. All in favor motion passes unanimously.

IV. Check Out (10 Minutes)
V. Adjourn