

REIAC Report Out - January 8th 2020

The REIAC's December meeting did not have a quorum and so we spent the time informally talking about the lack of process for reporting feedback to District Employees and pondering the effectiveness of the Cultural Proficiency training being given to District staff.

Communication Process

REIAC was told that we were not allowed to speak directly to district staff members because we are specifically an advisory committee to the Board. This particular rule remove's REIAC tone and intent when gathering and sharing information with the District. It's a classic game of telephone and the outcome is a series of miscommunication.

We are grateful that the High School has teachers who act, for all intents and purposes, as a building level equity team to step in and provide support for students and their fellow teachers. These teachers need to be recognized and commended. The process they used should be institutionalized. Ideally it would be helpful to have a staff member on this "building level equity team" to communicate and collaborate with.

Cultural Responsiveness

We shared concerns about the effectiveness of Generation Ready in providing Cultural Proficiency training to district staff. Staff should be given specific tools to evaluate curriculum or content such as the selection of a play. Asking staff to evaluate content from their singular perspective leaves numerous blind spots open.

How serious is the district about Cultural Proficiency? Is it just a PR tool, or is it a serious effort communicated out to everyone, where tools and expectations are well defined? REIAC has shared the NYU Steinhardt Center Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard several times with the BOE and the Superintendent. We've asked for the district to share it with staff as a guidepost. We've also asked if Generation Ready had a comparable scorecard. We are still waiting for feedback.

On Speaking Up

The following quotes represent some comments overheard by REIAC members pondering the group's role as a resource for the community, specifically students/students of color. For example, some have wondered, "Why did you go to them (the REIAC)?" to raise a specific concern within a school or classroom. To which we respond with the following:

- 1) We (REIAC) acknowledges the power dynamics/differential between students and teachers; and
- 2) We are allies, which means we are committed to the following -
§ Listen

- § Respect
- § Don't make assumptions
- § Believe
- § Understand
- § Support

Some faculty/administrators may have responded to hearing of the ways students have confided in REIAC with the following: "Why didn't you come to me?" Comments such as this tend to perpetuate the power differential and further put the onus on the student to articulate a reasoning that may make them more vulnerable. Instead, REIAC would encourage a self-reflective response to students who speak up, such as:

- § 'I'm listening.'
- § 'I recognize that I have work to do.'
- § 'I believe you.'
- § 'I appreciate the labor you've put in.'
- § 'How can I make this right?'

It's worth noting that when students are courageous enough to speak up, they are simultaneously vulnerable to great skepticism - which is a structural condition that keeps many students silent. For example, comments such as "They're just doing this to get a better part in the play" highlights the conflicted positionality of students, especially students of color, when they speak up.

Thus, silence or lack of prior conversation over challenging issues should not be understood as agreement or disinterest. Instead, cultivating classrooms and spaces where proactive conversation, listening and learning can be fostered is fundamental. Subsequently, having systems in place to support student's voices and feedback in a constructive way that supports their growth as young adults, and active community members, is key to their social development--and ours.