

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in special session on Wednesday, April 27, 2022 at 6:00 PM remotely.

Board members present: Ms. Adams, Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Roraback

Board members absent: Mrs. Booth and Mr. Stone

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance, Mrs. Keane, Director of Student Services and Special Education, Mrs. DiMaggio, Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, Mr. Brough, Human Resources Specialist, Mr. Pietrasko, Director of Infrastructure and Security Technology, Cheryl Gonzalez, Strong Middle School Principal and Debra Stone, Interim Coginchaug Regional High School Principal

Guests: Michelle LeBrun-Griffin, SERC, Dwight Sharpe, SERC and Calvin Terrell

Mrs. Petrella called the meeting to order at 6:02 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Mrs. Petrella acknowledged the efforts of the IT Department to facilitate this meeting.

Approval of Agenda

Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to approve the agenda, as presented.

In favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Ms. Adams, Ms. Betty, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Roraback. Motion carried.

Superintendent's discussion and board questions on Calvin Terrell's May 3, 2022 speaking engagement at Coginchaug Regional High School

Mrs. Petrella explained that she had done some research and received some comments about this issue and decided that the board needed to have a special meeting regarding how Mr. Terrell was recommended, how he was vetted and what the district was expecting from his conversation. Because of spring break and COVID, the meeting could not be held until tonight.

Dr. Schuch thanked the board for postponing the meeting. He explained that he has shared this information with the Well-Being Committee, but felt it was important to share with everyone. He also noted that he had shared comments in June, 2021 during his transition report that included the following: "the relative lack of racial, socioeconomic and language diversity in RSD 13 concerns many of our learners, families, employees and residents. The district recently adopted an equity policy that strengthens its commitment to all learners, but we will need to continue to work diligently to make every learner and family feel safe at school and fully included in all school-related functions. Those expressing concerns about the district's historical response to racial and other inequities did not generally characterize the district as being overtly racist in its daily practices. Instead, they shared concerns about systemic inequities within the district that have existed for decades or longer. They also worry that our learners may be somewhat unprepared to successfully navigate life after high school in places that are much more diverse than what they experience living here and attending our school."

Dr. Schuch noted that those were his reflections after being in the district for six months and nothing has changed his perception. However, he has begun to understand more clearly how some learners have felt simply because of the color of their skin. He asked some of those learners what they thought the solution might be and they all agreed that changing a culture could not happen overnight. Several suggestions have already been put into place, including doing something substantial to engage as many learners as possible and engage employees and the community.

Dr. Schuch reviewed that the district has been involved in equity-related work for several years, but learners clearly want and expect more. The State Education Resource Center (SERC) has been a partner in this work. Michelle LeBrun-Griffin and Dwight Sharpe from SERC were present at tonight's meeting. The district consulted with SERC about ways to move forward. He acknowledged that no single event will bring about the change that the district envisions.

Dr. Schuch believed that the district has an obligation to make the schools a safe and nurturing environment for all learners and to make them feel appreciated and respected for who they are as individuals. He added that that is not currently happening. He felt tonight's discussion should be framed around how to best move forward. SERC recommended Calvin Terrell and Dr. Schuch asked Michelle LeBrun-Griffin to explain that recommendation.

Ms. LeBrun-Griffin reviewed that the district has received a lot of feedback, but it hasn't all been negative. She explained that she had consulted for SERC for several years and Calvin Terrell has been a speaker for them, most commonly with youth. He has also done some keynote addresses for educators and administrators. She felt that Mr. Terrell is very special and very unique.

Ms. LeBrun-Griffin explained that Mr. Terrell permeates harmony and unity. He is able to engage with youth through music, poetry and his personal experiences in a very interactive way. She reviewed that focus groups had been held in both the high school and middle school and they heard that some interactions within the schools and the community aren't great. There have been some very specific incidents in the last 60 days that can no longer be ignored. Ms. LeBrun-Griffin felt that Calvin Terrell is the perfect match for this situation and can help the district heal from these events, but also learn and understand more about each other. She also explained that she has been in Mr. Terrell's settings four or five times, both with youth and adults. She has learned that she may be contributing unintentionally, but also that she could be an ally.

Ms. LeBrun-Griffin summarized that, based on both personal and professional experiences, they felt that Mr. Terrell was the best match for the situation and asked Dwight Sharpe to share his thoughts as well.

Mr. Sharpe echoed Ms. LeBrun-Griffin's comments and noted that he has not yet attended one of Mr. Terrell's presentations. He stated that Mr. Terrell's focus is all about healing and unifying the community. He felt that the district was looking for someone who could engage with students, staff and community and that is something that Mr. Terrell definitely does.

Dr. Schuch thanked both Ms. LeBrun-Griffin and Mr. Sharpe for their explanation. He then reviewed that they had shared Mr. Terrell's information with the entire leadership team and the group believed that it made sense to have him here. Dr. Schuch did state that the decision was ultimately his and, if people are upset with that, they should be upset with him. Dr. Schuch, Mrs. DiMaggio, Mrs. Keane, Mrs. Gonzalez and Mrs. Stone all met with Mr. Terrell as well and helped him to understand what the district was

expecting him to bring to the community. They asked him to engage secondary learners, employees and the community in a conversation about bullying, discrimination and related challenges. They described events to Mr. Terrell and specifically mentioned historically under-represented racial groups. They clearly described the district's demographics and Mr. Terrell noted that he had worked with communities just like ours.

During the conversation with Mr. Terrell, he suggested that they allow families to opt out. He is fully aware of how he is often perceived by those who have not met him and didn't want to force any learners to participate in an assembly if their parents or guardians were strongly opposed to it.

In terms of the contract itself, the cost is \$6,000 which includes programming fees, travel and incidentals. It is being funded through a Title IV grant. If the board decides to cancel the program, the district would be out the entire \$6,000 because it is very close to the date. Dr. Schuch reviewed that the plan is to have a combined morning assembly on May 3 for both Coginchaug and Strong learners at the high school, with an after-school faculty training for the combined faculty. In the evening, there will be a community forum. There had been a question about changing the order of that and Dr. Schuch explained that the contract is for Mr. Terrell to be here about 24 hours and his schedule is very tight. There were only two dates to choose from in May and June. Dr. Schuch did not believe they can change the order in any way, but could ask for modifications.

Mrs. Petrella asked if an additional cost would be involved to have the community meet with Mr. Terrell the night prior to the assembly. Dr. Schuch felt that it might, but they have not had that conversation. He added that it may not be practically possible. Ms. LeBrun-Griffin explained that Mr. Terrell is arriving on a very late flight the night before the assembly. She added that Mr. Terrell really wants to invest his time with the youth and then the faculty and community based on the conversations with the youth. He will work at the district from 8:00 AM until 8:00 PM and then return to the airport to fly back.

Mrs. Petrella asked if Mr. Terrell provides a syllabus or an outline of what he will talk about and Ms. LeBrun-Griffin stated that they are approving flyers that will go to Dr. Schuch and Mrs. DiMaggio for approval. The flyers will include the schedule for the day and a narrative about what will be happening. These can be provided to parents as well.

Mrs. Petrella summarized that the emails that have been received have been split between in favor and not. Mrs. Petrella felt that some of the things that Mr. Terrell has put out on social media as the exact opposite of harmony, unity, healing and community and she felt that that's where the biggest concern is coming from. She feels that Mr. Terrell was well-vetted and well-recommended, but his social media comments don't seem to jive with those words.

Ms. LeBrun-Griffin felt that Mr. Terrell has deep integrity, but also has partnerships with different organizations. He is a truth-teller and has lived through a lot of experiences that mimic what they are hearing from the youth in the district, including racist behaviors and poor interactions. He is not afraid to share his experiences and talk with the learners. She acknowledged that there is diversity in Region 13 and Mr. Terrell will celebrate that, but he will also elevate youth of color. He will show the value of individuals but emphasize how much stronger they can be together. Mr. Terrell is very aware of the fragileness of the youth in the district and will not do anything to trigger, upset or traumatize anyone.

Mr. Sharpe explained that he is a racial equity facilitator and trained in restorative practices. Truth is important to allow for healing. He believes that Mr. Terrell will bring peace and harmony through reconciliation and a recognition of what has happened. Mr. Terrell is a truth teller, but will make sure he handles it carefully and appropriately.

Mrs. Petrella noted that she is having a hard time reconciling what she is hearing with what she sees written on Mr. Terrell's social media.

Mr. Roraback felt that the opt-out option seems good, but could also be potentially divisive. He is a bit worried that it will be common knowledge of who is choosing to opt out and why. He felt that it should be for everybody and perhaps even mandatory. Mr. Roraback felt that Mr. Terrell's YouTube video was full of compassion and empathy, but the social media is different. Mr. Roraback felt that Mr. Terrell would be wonderful in a collegiate environment, but wasn't sure it is correct for the district.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked what the kids who opt out will be doing and Mrs. Stone explained that they will make a plan for those students to be engaged in some sort of work in a study hall with an adult. Mrs. Gonzalez stated that that was her plan as well, depending on how many students opt out.

Mrs. Dahlheimer was also concerned about kids who opt out being singled out and hoped that the schools will be mindful of that. Dr. Schuch agreed and felt that most parents who opt out may not formally opt their kids out and may just not send the kids to school that morning. He reminded everyone that both students and staff may actually be sick that day.

Mr. Moore asked what schools Mr. Terrell has spoken to in Connecticut and Ms. LeBrun-Griffin did not have that information, but offered to provide that tomorrow morning. She added that she felt it was very telling that the board had concerns about the students who may opt out.

Mrs. Caramanello would also like to know what schools in Connecticut Mr. Terrell has spoken to and felt that he sounds like a phenomenal speaker for adults. She felt that the social media posts have caused a big divide and she was concerned that a huge majority will opt out and those are probably the families that should really be there. She was concerned that they are looking for unity and this may not accomplish that. Mrs. Caramanello would also like to make this more of a community thing and have parents accompany their kids. She felt that it was the responsibility of the board to know more of the material.

Ms. LeBrun-Griffin reiterated that that is the majority of work that he has done in Connecticut and will provide the specific districts and schools. He remains student-centered, even in the adult learning space.

Mrs. Dahlheimer has seen a list of where he has spoken and it included Windsor and Manchester schools.

Mr. Mennone echoed everyone's comments, especially the social media aspect of this. He has received emails and been approached at athletic events. People are concerned because of the social media posts and the divisiveness there. He also felt that this would be more of an adult learning than for children.

Mrs. Dahlheimer reminded everyone that this is a time for questions, not discussion. She asked what CARE team Ms. LeBrun-Griffin mentioned and it was the student CARE team from the middle school and high school. There was a question about whether students were ready for this dialog and the answer

is yes. The students they met with blew them away and the majority of them were seventh graders and are very capable of higher-level critical thinking. Mr. Sharpe added that there was an amazing comprehension level and they are finding their voice to speak up for what is missing for them.

Public Comment about item #3

Mrs. Petrella stated that Mr. McGrath will explain how to access public comment and she asked everyone to stick to three minutes.

Frank Amirault, from Durham, felt that everyone should have an open mind. He did do some research on Mr. Terrell and looked at his social media. There was a statement that “white lies matter more than black lives” and Mr. Amirault asked if he would even be invited to come if the words white and black were switched. He does not feel that Mr. Terrell is right for the kids, though he is a great speaker. He felt that his message is divisive and whoever vetted this made a big error. He stated that he is an absolute no on this and wanted his voice to be heard. He noted that he had two kids go through the district and acknowledged that it has been amazing. He is not anti-open opinion, but is anti-this guy.

Donna Reed, from Durham, confirmed that this contract was not presented to the board before being executed. She contacted the Secretary of State in Arizona and was told that Mr. Terrell’s business has been dissolved and he has not filed in three years. She is appalled by what she read on his social media and felt that he was not for our community. She read from Mr. Terrell’s social media about the Divided States of America and noted that she would not like him speaking to this community. She felt that this should have been presented to the board before a contract was signed and asked the board to reconsider.

Audree Kane, from Durham, agreed that Mr. Terrell is not suitable for the children. She did a quick Google search and found an article from the Amherst Bulletin where he spoke at the middle school. The majority of his program focused on role playing, stories, games and facts to engage children, but also asked the students to do something “intense.” He asked them to close their eyes and visualize going to a community event with loved ones. He then asked them to visualize a gunman shooting and killing their loved ones and then imagining their funeral. Mrs. Kane explained that her son is intellectually disabled and a concrete thinker. If he was asked to imagine that, he would have a very difficult time deciphering between imagination and reality and it would cause unnecessary emotional stress. For that reason, he will keep her son home on May 3rd. Mrs. Kane also found a YouTube video titled “Virtual Equity of Keynote Speaker, Calvin Terrell” from March 31, 2021. He stated that we are one human race, but also stated that white folks need to get off the pedestal and black people out of the pit to meet on the field of justice. He also talked about ways that people are passive and complicit and no one is free of prejudice. He gives the impression that whites need to atone for their sins and stereotypes that blacks are oppressed. Mrs. Kane does not believe with his line of thought and, for that reason, will keep her older son home on May 3rd. She loves the district and everyone who has worked with her sons, but stated that it seems like they feel it is their responsibility to educate the children on racial issues and social inequities. She feels that that is the responsibility of the parents, not the school.

Mary Ann O’Brien, from Durham, asked what the objectives are of this conversation and how they will be measured. She would like to know how the district will know if he succeeded and if there will be any follow-up. She does not feel that racial equity can be solved in one talk.

Nicole Ercolani agreed that some type of outreach is needed, but the focus will be on safety. She felt that they need to consider the appropriateness and the background of the speaker. Mrs. Ercolani had to go through years of training to become a nurse and needs to participate in ongoing training as well as specialty training. She asked what type of education Mr. Terrell has and what type of licensure he has to be able to talk about trauma. She would like to know when he graduated, what degree he has and where he is licensed to teach. Ms. Ercolani also asked what the fallout will be from this conversation and how the district plans to handle that. She also asked if there was a guarantee that there would be no traumatization. In summary, she pointed out that there is liability here, dealing with a huge mental health aspect. She does believe something needs to happen, but wonders about the appropriateness of this. She is questioning the actual vetting that occurred.

Leslie Paoletti, from Durham, agreed that the students in this district are very smart. The students feel this would be helpful to them and are supportive of this. She noted that she is not on social media and has not vetted the speaker, but trusts the administrators in District 13 and SERC. She feels that this divisiveness shows that there is a tremendous need for efforts in this direction. Mrs. Paoletti also serves on the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee and there are issues in Durham. She agrees that this will take a lot of time and they can't put their heads in the sand.

Mike Charron, from Durham, urged the superintendent and Board of Education to not move forward with Mr. Terrell's presentation scheduled for May 3rd. He had previously emailed, noting the many things on Mr. Terrell's social media accounts that he believes disqualify him from being an appropriate speaker for our students. Mr. Charron described an image that Mr. Terrell created comparing European explorers and European migrants to a cancer. He does not believe it's appropriate to label a group of people based on their nationality, ancestry or skin color as being a cancer. There are numerous examples of Mr. Terrell labeling conservative parents as white nationalists and fascists. Mr. Charron was raised with the belief that name-calling and stereotyping is bullying and does not feel it's appropriate that the district brings in someone who has consistently engaged in this type of behavior.

Heidi Johnson, from Durham, explained that she has a son and a daughter at Strong School and their family is looking forward to this speaker. The kids have already been on Mr. Terrell's social media and are discussing who is opting out and who is attending. They have considered if their discomfort as a white family is more or less important than the needs of kids of color in school who are experiencing negative interactions and the incidents which just can't be ignored. She felt that some discomfort is going to be necessary to move forward and she is in favor of this speaker.

Laura, from Durham, stated that she has three kids in the district and wanted to applaud the superintendent's attention to this important issue. She wanted to offer an alternative. She is an employee in a neighboring town and they just had a social-emotional learning curriculum put in place, the Choose Love Movement. It echoes the district's core ethical values very well and talks about creating a safer and more loving school community. It was created by the mother of a Sandy Hook victim, but does not talk about gun violence. She notes that behaviors could have possibly prevented that tragedy. She did send an email to Mrs. Petrella and explained that the basic message is kindness. This is a K-12 curriculum and Laura did not feel anyone would have any issues with basic kindness.

Antonio Almodovar, from Durham, stated that he hasn't vetted the speaker, but his concern is that if anyone is going to influence his children that it should be him, the parent. He would not be opposed to having the speaker share his information with staff to help them identify potential issues or speaking to

high school students who are about to embark on college life. Diversity is important. Mr. Almodovar is Puerto Rican, raised in New Haven and has been in the public service sector his whole adult life. He agreed that it will take time to change the culture, but he is opposed to divisiveness, rhetoric that creates guilt and to someone that wants to plant the seed in his child's brain that will make them doubt who they are. Mr. Almodovar believes that this is about respect and about knowing each other. He agreed that the issue that took place in school recently was sad and tragic, but felt that the parents also need to be held accountable. He felt that he is perfectly capable of teaching his children respect for each other, respect for other human beings, decency and diversity. Mr. Almodovar would be opposed to the speaker sharing his thoughts with students, but would not be opposed to him presenting to staff and any parents.

Silas Hart, from Middlefield, felt that this is a pretty awesome district. He moved from Meriden for the school system and appreciates everyone's efforts. As a single parent of two half-Hispanic and white kids and in an interracial marriage, he applauds this conversation. He seconded everyone's opinions that the issue is the vessel from which this conversation comes. The conversation is not up for debate. It needs to happen and everyone needs to understand what minorities face, but when someone comes in, without being properly vetted and having a proper outline of what will be discussed, it is very dangerous and irresponsible. He felt that parents should be able to decide if their kids would be involved after seeing an outline of what will be discussed. Parents need to know what will be discussed and what will happen and, right now, they don't. Mr. Hart felt it was unfair for the district to ask them to make a decision without providing that information. He also did not like the idea of students having to sit together in the cafeteria if they are not going to the presentation. He felt that the conversation can be agreed upon by everybody and having somebody come in who may speak divisively is not appropriate. Mr. Hart felt that he cannot send his child without the appropriate information and it's sad because she might benefit from the conversation.

Sofia Stephan, from Durham, explained that is a sophomore and is speaking on behalf of the Students Against Racism group at Coginchaug. They are working to combat inequality. She thanked Dr. Schuch, Ms. LeBrun-Griffin and Mr. Sharpe for speaking on behalf of the student body. The students realize that they have a responsibility to their peers affected by injustice and their group has been working to instill that change in the study body. Their group sent an email to the board, including a list of student-reported incidences regarding discriminatory injustices as well as a list of big picture goals that they hope to accomplish. They also included a request to continue to reach out to trained professionals, like Mr. Terrell, to help solve these crises and to recognize these issues instead of pretending they don't exist. They also asked that stronger guidelines for discipline and/or responses to issues be established and promoted by the board. Ms. Stephan added that she felt it was important for the board to know that students are able to recognize and comprehend their own thoughts from someone else's especially since they have grown up with social media and are used to weeding out what make sense from what doesn't. She felt that they should be able to receive information from all different experts. Middle school and high school students should not be protected from the prejudices of the world forever. Learning from the mistakes of the past is how positive changes are made in the future. Ms. Stephen added that if anyone had any questions, their group has an Instagram account, @against_racism.rsd13 or they can email Julia Talbert-Slagle who created their group.

Becca Gedney, from Durham, stated that her son is a minority student who graduated last year and his experience was not the same as hers was. He left the district with the impression that everyone in town is a racist which makes her really sad. She believes that is the job of the parents to teach their kids, but a lot of students are being taught things that are disgusting which is evident on social media and what has been

taking place in the schools. She commends the district for making a decision and trying to make a safe place for the students.

Carol Bufithis, from Middlefield, is very excited about the possibility of having Mr. Terrell spend the day at District 13. She thanked Dr. Schuch as well as Ms. LeBrun-Griffin and Mr. Sharpe. She added that no one has any idea how every child will take this information in, but she wishes her children had more experiences like this. She acknowledged that her children didn't get to be with a lot of diversity until they left the district. Ms. Bufithis noted that most people speaking tonight are against this, but felt that it would be such a good thing for the community. She asked everyone to trust the process. Transformation is oftentimes uncomfortable and disruptive, but they should give the kids credit to be able to handle this.

Doug O'Rourke, from Middlefield, stated that the district is wonderful and he has two kids at Strong, one at Brewster and one at Memorial. They are recent transplants from Middletown and they have had a great story in Middlefield. He agreed with a lot of the callers about Mr. Terrell, but does believe that diversity training is needed. He would not be opposed to the kids learning about diversity and equity, but felt that Mr. Terrell goes way too far in the other direction. He believes that there are others who could come in to do this training that are not as divisive. Mr. O'Rourke felt that Mr. Terrell's social media and YouTube videos speak for themselves and include very divisive comments. He is opposed to this speaker and his kids will not attend.

Maygan Morello, from Rockfall, also had some hesitation about the opt-out option which makes it seem divisive. She was also not a huge fan of her sixth-grader joining the high schoolers. Sixth grade has made her son grow up a lot faster and they have had conversations that she did not think they would be having. She understands why this is divisive, however it is already paid for and parents have the option to opt out. Regarding social media, she personally left Facebook because she couldn't believe how members of our community spoke to each other. Mrs. Morello is leaning towards attending the parent session with her child.

Maureen Funke congratulated the National Honor Society inductees and thanked the Well-Being Committee and Dr. Schuch. She felt that this is not only necessary, but appropriate and she fully supports the speaker and all of the planned events. She felt that there was a fair amount of opposition, yet very few suggestions. She noted that Mr. Sharpe and Ms. Griffin do this work daily and should be trusted. Mrs. Funke also felt that parents of minorities and under-represented groups in this community do not get a guarantee that their child won't be traumatized at school, so the idea that others may be traumatized at the event is relatively foreign to her. She also hopes that no one is judged on their worst social media posts. Some of the comments she has seen and the events that have occurred have made her question why they moved to town. She felt that they need to attract people to the district, not scare them away. She hoped that if this event is modified at all that, at the very least, the staff training and community event are allowed to proceed. Mrs. Funke also suggested a mandatory orientation at the beginning of the school year at Strong and Coginchaug, if not all the schools, clarifying what is and is not tolerated.

David Zemelsky stated that his three children went through the district's schools and wished that they had had this opportunity. He believes that kids know what's good for them and it's very true that they are curious and craving to know more about the history of people of color. He hears people talking about divisiveness and worrying about their kids being traumatized, but does not feel that this is an instance of that. He believes that the only hope for this country getting out of this rut of racism is to educate the kids.

Daphne Liss, a student at Strong School and part of the CARE (Coginchaug Alliance for Racial Equity) group, stated that everyone in CARE feels that Mr. Terrell should come to the schools. If people aren't taught about bad things that have happened in history, how will they change what will happen in the future.

Anthony Kerns, from Durham, stated that he was on the fence about the speaker. He would like to know what will be discussed before making any judgment. Hearing the comments about social media makes him feel uncomfortable about him speaking to his child. He also feels that this was presented quickly with no time for research and it was underhanded. Mr. Kerns believes that diversity and equity training needs to be done, but a lot of that happens with individual parents and students at home. He doesn't feel it's fair to group everyone into one group. He stated that he is not aware of any healing that needs to be done. He is aware that there have been some incidents, but doesn't know any details to be able to base his opinion on what needs to be done. Mr. Kerns is not in favor of this speaker speaking to his child, but will leave that decision to his child.

Eileen Buckheit is in favor of the speaker and feels that the community has a lot of work to do as far as diversity, equity and inclusion. She believes that the recent failure of the committee in town says a lot about the wounds that are not being addressed. She was impressed by the introduction and her daughter will be attending. Mrs. Buckheit stated that two incidents occurred at Strong School today that were borderline bullying for attending the program. She finds it incredibly sad that parents are pushing this down to their children. She reiterated that she is very disappointed in what is happening in Region 13.

Ariana Eddinger, from Middlefield, stated that she is in eighth grade and is a CARE student ambassador at Strong School. She felt that a lot of parents are not aware of the incidents that have been happening at school. She has personally heard the "N" word being said multiple times as well as other racial slurs and felt that it is, in a way, being normalized which is absolutely not okay. People have mentioned how teachers should be taught what to do, but most of the time teachers don't mention it or do anything about it. If anything is done, it is very minimal. This has been happening for multiple years and students are thinking it is okay when it should not be accepted or be okay. She feels that Mr. Terrell will provide an amazing, eye-opening experience.

Mariah Roy, from Durham, commended all the learners who have been brave enough to speak out about what's going on in the schools. She noted that all of the learners are in support of Mr. Terrell coming to speak and they are the ones he will be addressing first and most directly. Her children are at Brewster and are not experiencing what the older learners are talking about. Mrs. Roy went to a presentation about how to talk to kids about race and activism by Mr. Sharpe and trusts his judgment and opinions about Mr. Terrell. She believes that things are much more volatile than they used to be and sympathy isn't doing any service to the community. Learners are reaching out for help and want Mr. Terrell to come and speak. She is excited to see the speaker and to learn from him.

Lucy Meigs, from Durham, will be very sad if the board doesn't approve the presentation by Calvin Terrell as they would be missing an opportunity that the learners are ready for. She has seen some of his programs online and felt that he is the sort of person the district needs. She is glad that the district reached out to SERC and got help.

Mr. McGrath reported that there were no more new speakers, but three people wished to speak again. Mrs. Petrella preferred to not have people speak a second time. She thanked everyone for coming forward, both speaking tonight and sending emails.

Superintendent and board discussion about speaker

Mrs. Petrella summarized that quite a number of speakers were concerned about Mr. Terrell specifically, but still felt that the issue of racism and bullying needed to be brought before the students and the community. She believes the concern is about some of the background of the speaker, with social media being the biggest issue. Having an outline available to the parents and possibly the community prior to the presentation is necessary. She also wondered if there were any ways to address some of the concerns that were brought up.

Mrs. Petrella also explained that is not the board's decision to go forward or not with this program. The board will offer their comments, concerns and recommendations, but this is an administrative decision. She also asked if there was any other way to help relieve concerns that parents have. Mrs. Petrella spent a lot of time watching Mr. Terrell's videos and read his biography and felt comfortable until she saw the social media posts.

Dr. Schuch summarized that the community feels they need to be on this issue. He also noted that Mr. Terrell has been watching the meeting tonight and can jump on to try address some of these issues, if the board would like.

Calvin Terrell joined the meeting at this point. Mrs. Petrella asked how he would come to a group of students to talk about unity and humanity after having the social media posts that he has. Mr. Terrell explained that he has worked for years in getting neo-Nazis and gang-bangers to leave that type of lifestyle and there are a number of those organizations who try to hack him. He uses his social media to provoke dialogue and expose those organizations. They do not want young white people to realize that they are not superior to other people and are part of a global reality. White nationalism is a real issue. Mr. Terrell explained that social media is not about real life, but is provocation. The work he does speaks for itself.

Mr. Terrell did admit that he had some concerns about sixth to twelfth grade, with such a developmental gap. He has done this work throughout Connecticut, in Groton, Mystic, Hartford, West Hartford, Simsbury and Avon, and everything has been amazing. He is grateful for the adults who are concerned about the well-being of their children, but he also believes people have a very low expectation of white children. Putting white kids in a bubble is not going to help them be globally literate.

Mr. Terrell summarized that his social media is about provoking thought, conversation and revealing Nazis, but his work in person is about helping everybody remember that we all cry and smile in the same language and everyone's blood is red.

Mr. Terrell also noted that there is a lot of superficial understanding about how race impacts all identity issues. Europeans renamed themselves the white race and they have to get to why that happened. He believes that the kids are ready to do that and the fragility is on the part of the adults.

Mrs. Dahlheimer noted that there is a big concern about a speech online that Mr. Terrell gave in Massachusetts. Parents were concerned that they would not be able to speak to him before he spoke to their children. She asked if he has considered having the community forum before the assembly. Mr. Terrell stated that the Amherst issue is one issue out of thousands. There were people in the area that wanted the Irish, working-class superintendent gone and they did not follow his suggested protocol. He worked with students from Amherst College and they did skits which shocked some of the community. Mr. Terrell reiterated that it is his suggestion that kids and parents have an opt-out and he is planning to let the kids know to not harass anyone for opting out. He talks about how violence can go from laughter to tears and how kids weaponize social media. Prejudice is much bigger than race. Mr. Terrell stated that at the end of his presentations, kids apologize to each other but a lot of times they go back to classrooms where adults aren't ready to do this kind of work.

Mrs. Caramanello asked about the superintendent in Amherst and Mr. Terrell confirmed that she came from an Irish, working-class background. Amherst is a really hyper-liberal space. A lot of comments were made about the superintendent on social media. Mrs. Caramanello admitted that she believes he is a great speaker with a wealth of knowledge, but really wished that the social media was not a part of it. She certainly understands the neo-Nazi groups, but also felt that he loses a lot of white people with that divisiveness. Mr. Terrell suggested Mrs. Caramanello read the books named, *How the Irish Became White*, *How Jews Became White Folks* and *Are Italians White*. Prior to World War I, these groups were not considered white. Mr. Terrell would like to be united with all humankind, but everything has been on white terms. He would like white people to not be emotionally hijacked by the word "whiteness." He stated that he will constantly use the word "whiteness" because it was made up. Mr. Terrell also explained that Ralph Abernathy is his cousin and this work is in his blood. Unless people have studied and lived this, understanding is superficial at best. Mr. Terrell felt that the beauty of this call is that parents, whether they want him there or not, will be having conversations about this in their homes.

Mr. Roraback felt that students are apprehensive about their ability to deal with the diverse world that they will be going into, though he feels they are pretty well-prepared. He would love to see some real historical things and asked Mr. Terrell if he was familiar with William Edward Burghardt Du Bois from Great Barrington, MA. He grew up looking different than his entire community. He hoped that the message could be what he did to get out of that situation which is uplifting and positive. Parents fear their children will be demoralized and demeaned and Mr. Roraback would love to see something really uplifting. Mr. Terrell explained that his message is about truth and what has happened historically, but also the possibility of humankind. He shares that human bodies are literally made of stardust and light and they do not have to blow out each other's candles. That is what has happened historically and continues right now. He also explained that 82 percent of the earth is non-white, so no service is being done to white children by not preparing them to become globally literate. He also felt that it seems like there's no consideration for non-white children and what they go through and that historically it has been white supremacy and no regard for what non-white people are going through. Mr. Terrell hopes that District 13 is not that kind of a district.

Mrs. Petrella asked Mr. Terrell to convince the community that he is the right person to speak to their children. He explained that he doesn't have that kind of power, but would say that he loves them and is a warrior. He would die for them and die for their babies. He is here to call all colors to be better than history. He would hope that white men will talk to white men about how they can be better than white history. If you are a black woman, talk to black women about how they can be better than their history. Mr.

Terrell has worked with students all over the world and has helped them do amazing things, but the choice is up to the parents.

Mrs. Dahlheimer noted that the contract says the conversation will be off the cuff and focus on respect. Mr. Terrell explained that he breaks down the etymology of the word “respect” right in the beginning. Re is a prefix meaning fresh and new and spect is a Latin root word meaning to look. Respect literally means to look again. He then invites the scholars to look at their life and how they have been part of the solution and part of the problem.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked how he will reach the younger kids in the audience and Mr. Terrell explained that kids get it. He has them look stuff up on their phones. Kids are ready and they respond. He has worked in private schools in Stamford, right down to juvenile detention centers in Los Angeles and the kids respond.

Mrs. Petrella added that some parents wanted to see some kind of syllabus or outline before the program. She also noted that she, as well as other board members, will be present during the presentation. Mr. Terrell would be more than willing to provide a breakdown of key points, but also hoped that they ask that of every speaker or presenter. He also mentioned the attempted genocide of native people in these lands, including Connecticut. Mr. Terrell will send the outline and hoped that people listening will send their babies. If not, he urged everyone to have a conversation to those that went about what they liked and didn't like.

Mrs. Petrella then reviewed that it is not the board's decision as to whether or not Mr. Terrell speaks to the district's students on May 3rd. She was grateful that Mr. Terrell came on the call and hoped that people got a better understanding. She reiterated that she intends to attend the student assembly as well as the faculty meeting and community forum.

Mr. Moore felt that the students are very ready to handle this conversation and felt that Mr. Terrell's comments about history and other things are important for the kids to understand. The district has a goal to make their students global citizens and they need the opportunity to think and talk about these issues. Kids have stepped up and he believes they are ready to handle this.

Mrs. Petrella felt that this was just the beginning and issues need to be looked at from various perspectives. She still has some reservations, but is willing to see what happens.

Mrs. Dahlheimer echoed Mrs. Petrella's comments and felt that their frustration comes from knowing the community and so many of the kids and the fact that they could have helped a lot in choosing and vetting someone so that this divisiveness didn't happen. She felt it was heartbreaking to see Mr. Terrell's social media and didn't take it from a provoking stance. Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if it would be possible for families to Zoom in to the presentation so that they can have the experience, but be with their parents. Ms. LeBrun-Griffin spoke with Mr. Terrell about that last night and he would prefer that it not be recorded so that nothing is taken out of context. Ms. LeBrun-Griffin was grateful to the board for even holding this meeting and to Mr. Terrell for showing up.

Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that Mr. Terrell would be okay with having his work recorded if he was really proud of his work in its entirety. Dr. Schuch added that his experience with keynote speakers is they don't allow themselves to be recorded for almost like a copyright infringement. His answer to families that

would want that would be to ask them to come to the evening presentation to experience it together. Dr. Schuch felt that having children watch this with their parents is a very different way to encounter this and they would not be able to have side conversations with their peers. Ms. LeBrun-Griffin agreed that there are proprietorship issues, future misuse of the recording and that it is important to protect the experience of the youth. Mrs. Dahlheimer hoped that the principals could remind parents about the community event and Dr. Schuch agreed.

Mrs. Caramanello also felt that this is just the beginning. Her fear is that it get dropped after the program is over. She would love to see more speakers and programs where the focus becomes more of accepting each other's differences. She would also like to see this become a community speaking event than not having Mr. Terrell come at all.

Mrs. DiMaggio thanked Ms. LeBrun-Griffin and Mr. Sharpe for being at the meeting. She explained that the district is being very planful and SERC is working with students and will be working with staff to get them more comfortable to have these kinds of conversations. Everyone wants the students to feel safe, accepted and respected and how they get there is a journey. Things are now beginning to be addressed and she thanked the board for having this meeting as well.

Ms. Adams really wished that Dr. Schuch had vetted this differently from the beginning. She agreed that SERC provides great resources, but if vetting was done, they could have at least known what they were up against. The conversation has to happen as do many others. Her fear with Mr. Terrell coming is not about his message or what he has to say, but more about the controversy. There is so much divisiveness in the community around this that it would have been so much better to start this conversation in a different way. Ms. Adams also mentioned the letter from David Lowry about Omar Thornton, the shooter at Hartford Distributors when Mr. Lowry worked there, who cited Calvin Terrell. She does not blame Mr. Terrell for that shooting, but there is some community thought and blame for that connection. Ms. Adams was mainly concerned that the kids get something really great out of this and that it not be all about this conflict.

Mr. Mennone still finds the social media part of it difficult to get by and he doesn't totally agree with provoking conversation in that way. He does believe he will have some positive influence, but still has reservations. He also felt that this speaker should have been vetted and they could have taken others into consideration who maybe weren't as controversial. He is more saddened to continually hear learners say this is a rampant thing that's been going on for years. Being around a number of teachers and kids, he just can't see anyone letting that kind of behavior go on. He felt that it comes down to parents and respect. He also feels that Mr. Terrell has said some extremely controversial things towards law enforcement as well that he is not too happy about.

Ms. Betty emailed links about the Connecticut State School Coalition that provides information on anti-bias/anti-bullying programs that would be money well-spent to continue this. Everyone agrees that these issues need to be addressed. Bullying is a very big issue and is starting even at the elementary schools. Ms. Betty asked to clarify if Mr. Terrell was, in fact, a certified teacher and if his business has been dissolved.

Ms. Lebrun-Griffin explained that she could provide Mr. Terrell's vita, but he does have a few degrees. He was an educator at the middle school level.

Mrs. Petrella summarized that everyone doesn't have to agree with what Mr. Terrell has said or will say, but this is a start of a dialog and what the district will be offering in the future. This should not be the only point or the only opinion. She also asked that the board be an integral part of the vetting and knowledge process in the future. They should be given information before decisions are made, especially with regard to these types of issues. She emphasized that they all want what is best for the kids and all types of bullying are prevalent, not only in the district, but all over and is something that needs to be addressed. Mrs. Petrella added that it really upsets her that there is so much focus on the negative when there are so many positive things happening in the district and they seem to have lost sight of that.

Mr. Roraback noted that the Well-Being Committee would have been a great place to start the discussion about a speaker and it perhaps would be a good idea to have a work session before board meetings. Mrs. Dahlheimer hoped that they don't lose sight of the systemic bullying in general that's going on in the district. This community is very diverse in thought and has a division of wealth. While racism is a part of the bullying problem, she would not want to lose sight of the other victims of bullying who are suffering and hoped that they will not wait until the fall to address it. She would not want them to feel less important than the victims of racial bullying.

Ms. LeBrun-Griffin shared the student focus group summaries with Mr. Terrell and they included other bullying as well.

Mrs. Caramanello agreed with Mrs. Dahlheimer as well. Mrs. Petrella suggested that there be some type of team-building activities for students who are not participating in the assembly so that they know the importance of respecting, appreciating and understanding each other as well. Mrs. Caramanello felt that was a great idea and noted that most likely the kids opting out would be doing so due to a family or parent decision. Mrs. Petrella added that the students might be more inclined to come to school to participate in those activities.

Mrs. Dahlheimer also hoped that the SRO and possibly another trooper could be present that day because it is the day of the referendum as well and if there is backlash, she believes the parents would feel better knowing there is more coverage. Mrs. Petrella added that the adults are the examples for the children and set the tone. If the students are expected to be respectful and accept diversity and inclusion, the adults need to be the prime examples of that.

Mrs. Petrella reiterated that the board does not make the decision as to whether to cancel or move ahead with the speaker and the decision rests with the administration. She appreciated everyone's input. Dr. Schuch thanked everyone as well and stated that he has heard the board loud and clear that they feel like they should have had more information about this sooner and will try to do better with that. He has also heard the some of the board members would want to be involved with the vetting process and he will give that some thought. He apologized to the board and the community for not doing a better job with communication. Dr. Schuch has not heard anything tonight that has made him want to change direction on this, but added that they are all a team and if the board does not want them to move forward with this, then they will not. He has heard a lot of concerns from the board, but also a lot of consensus. He has heard concerns from the community, but feels that is almost a 50/50 split. To Dr. Schuch, the learner voice is extremely important and they are asking for this to be done.

Dr. Schuch understands that this may not be the perfect person at the perfect time and the communication could have been better, but he applauds everyone for being willing to do this work. He hopes that people will reconsider based on what Mr. Terrell had to say tonight and asked everyone to help spread the word.

Mrs. Petrella thanked Ms. LeBrun-Griffin and Mr. Sharpe for taking the time tonight.

Adjournment

Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Ms. Adams, to adjourn the special meeting of the Board of Education.

In favor of adjourning the special meeting of the Board of Education: Ms. Adams, Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Roraback. Motion carried.

Meeting was adjourned at 10:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First