**Racial Imbalance Advisory Council Meeting**

**Tuesday, April 2, 2024**

9:00-10:30am

Online Remote Participation (Zoom)

**Council Chair:** Raul Fernandez, Ed.D.

**Council Members in Attendance:** Matt Brunell, J.D.; Lateefah Franck, M.Ed.; Renée Heywood, Ph.D.; Julia Jarquin; Lamikco T. Magee, M.Ed., J.D., Ph.D.; Laurie Hunter, M.Ed., Ed.D.; Marieme Ngom; Darlene Spencer

**Council Members Not in Attendance**: Cleonie Mainvielle, MSW; Monica Roberts; Jessica S. Samuel, Ph.D.

**Welcome & Agenda Overview**

* March meeting minutes were approved with no abstentions or edits.

**Updated District Standards & Indicators Overview**

* Erica Gonzales, Robbie Havdala, Corinne Thomas, and Kevin Daly from DESE’s Office of District Reviews and Monitoring (ODRM) team provided an overview of their updated District Standards and Indicators which will be shared with the Council for review in May.
* The district review process generally entails approximately 20 highly comprehensive reviews conducted annually that utilize pre-existing outlined standards and indicators. The office has been updating the current indicators using DESE’s Racial Equity Decision-Making Tool (REDT) to ensure that indicators are grounded in recent research on best practice, are grounded in racial equity, and are aligned with DESE’s strategic objectives. This process began in the summer of 2023 in collaboration with other departments at DESE. The goal at the next meeting is to get input from RIAC on how best to promote racial equity. There will also be a survey due at the end of the month.
* The process is not an audit. It is a public process which makes recommendations based on the findings. The hope is that districts/municipalities use the recommendations to move forward.
* When on site, focus groups are held for middle school and high school students during the school day as well as for parents in multiple languages.
* Regarding racial integration, the team is meeting with and has met with multiple advocacy groups and is seeking their feedback via the survey. AMSEL will be included in the distribution list for the survey.
* The main priority of this document is for DESE to lay out the specific indicators of a successful school district. While this document does not directly focus on alleviating attacks on district leaderships’ DEI initiatives, there is nothing that prevents this document from being used in such a way and also includes a section on school committee governance since not all committee members share the same perspectives. These metrics outline the expectations from DESE whose role is to highlight best practices for promoting racial equity. DESE recommends that council members divide the review of the report for ease of receiving the feedback at the upcoming meeting.

**RIAC Annual Report**

* DESE reiterated that the Council should continue to use publicly available resources for consistency across all groups/committees/councils and to utilize data that is already publicly available given the limited capacity of DESE staff. The Council should continue to leverage the expertise of council members and include the request for a paid staff member to support data collection in their annual report.
* It will still be helpful for DESE to show the Council how to locate the data or have resources pooled across multiple councils so that there is staff support available. This should be included in the annual report since the Board does review these reports. In this instance, the Council has been extremely fortunate to have external colleagues who have the capacity and skill to be able to produce this data.
* The updated dataset now includes race and ethnicity for several student demographics as well as race and ethnicity, salary, and evaluation for teacher demographics. The RIAC used this additional data to create different models using Tableau. The Council noted that it will be helpful to have salary data on a school-level, not just district-level.
* Gaps exist at every data point between segregated white and non-white populations and people cannot be numb to these gaps that pervade each and every metrics of this dataset. It is wrong and illegal to maintain school systems in such a way. There are metrics that buck the trend, although they are few and far between.
* DESE acknowledges these gaps and is seeking recommendations that can RIAC make in the annual report to address them beyond simply identifying disparities. Both are equally important and valuable for the Board to have. The work does not end with one annual report so the Council should continue to think about what type of information will be helpful to have because equity work is ongoing.
* Councilmember recommendations:
  + As a starting point, the Council should build upon the best practices that the Department draws from.
  + Unfortunately, school property taxes are linked to school funding and how this is a barrier for families of color. How can we better resource the school districts where students of color live to improve the schools and what is being done with those resources? Having educators of color is also important because there are multiple factors about why the data is this way. The Council’s recommendations need to include multiple perspectives.
  + It’s very important to showcase this data so people see how persistent the disparities are across subgroups. This then allows us to answer the more difficult question of what the solutions with respect to geographic location are.
  + METCO is not a perfect program because harm can be caused when students are racially isolated. Districts are not necessarily integrating culturally and linguistically responsive practices so mandating DEI training for educators and seeking accountability from leadership needs to be on the table. However, there are ramifications around mandates that also have the potential to cause harm.
  + It will be interesting to see the data around METCO districts to see if it’s working for Black and brown students. How do we monopolize on the current division of resources?
  + The report should note what should not be done- high stakes accountability measures do not work. DESE surprised superintendents this past fall by seeking to factor in chronic absenteeism as part of the rating system (a comment at the end of this meeting noted that the Board ultimately decided not to include the proposal to include chronic absenteeism as part of the accountability system).

**Closing & Next Steps**

* Public Comment:
  + Andre King—coming from the Barnstable School Committee—these issues are pronounced across urban areas in the state; there is a noted challenge on the Cape as the largest district here. The challenges experienced by students in segregated schools- increasingly Black students are having the same outcomes when they are in all white schools. These same disparities exist. All white teaching staff can see this as well. We need support.
* At the end of this meeting, a comment noted that as the Council continues to review the data in Tableau, it is important to be wary of drawing causal inferences where correlations exist. Scatterplots are great for showing correlations and patterns but can lead to drawing preemptive conclusions.
* Next Steps
  + RIAC to receive Tableau data for individual review in preparation for discussion on Massachusetts General Laws during the May meeting
  + DESE to share ODRM presentation deck and survey and [High Performance in High Poverty Schools: 90/90/90 and Beyond Report](https://content.schoolinsites.com/api/documents/3b64b20cd461483198eae03f8c8fea10.pdf) and respond to the chair’s questions on Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 71, sections 37C & 37D
* Next meeting: Monday, May 6th from 10:00-11:30am