

Daniel Boone School Board updated on diversity awareness

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Daniel Boone Area School Board members have begun planning for the start of the 2012-13 school year with strong messages to students and staff that the district supports and encourages ethnic, religious, and sexual orientation toleration for everyone.

Board member Walter P. Sheehan said at the board's June 11 meeting that the district's new Diversity Committee is off to a good start with many positive comments and suggestions. "The three meetings have been very well attended by the public, board, and the student body," said Sheehan.

"We're diving in the first week of September for the kindergarten through twelfth grade curriculum and with different levels at the different buildings.

We're currently looking for a common language around respectfulness, kindness, courtesy, patience, humility, self-control, courage, etc., and to have it constantly in front of the students at all times."

The Diversity Committee was formed after a Feb. 29 incident of racial slurs written on the mirror in a men's bathroom at the high school. Sheehan said high school social studies teachers will use teachable moments from the news or school incidents to further discuss diversity issues and to teach tolerance.

Other ideas presented at the meetings include creating unity events, a mentoring program, small group discussions of seniors, juniors, sophomores, and freshman, motivational speakers, trainings, and continuing to review all of the district's policies for unbiased practices and language.

He said student handbooks should also include a "no tolerance" value contract - or code of honor - that requires it be read and signed by every student.

Board President Andrew Basile said the honor code could be included on more student items than just a contract that would be signed at the beginning of the school year.

The committee has a good cross-section of people in the community," said Superintendent Dr. Gary L. Otto, adding, "The meetings are a good start but, as I said in my commencement speech, it's how you finish up that matters."

Monica Lacey, Douglassville, one of the residents who requested that the district form a Diversity Committee for staff and students, thanked Otto for his leadership and agreed that the committee is going very well.

"It is a good start but it is how you finish up that matters," said Lacey, repeating Otto's message. "The student impact on the committee is phenomenal and they have a lot to say." "Sometimes we don't give our students enough credit, but they do have a lot of good ideas and they did it very well," said Otto.

Basile asked Assistant Superintendent Anne Marie Traynor if the district's department chairs are influencing any changes to their department's curriculum, which could positively or negatively impact student test scores.

"Do test scores fall to the department chairs - and could we hold some people more accountable by changing department chairs who have held the positions for a number of years?" asked Basile, adding, "What are they doing to change the test scores - to change the curriculum? Two years ago we asked the department chairs to come before us and tell us what they were doing to improve test scores - and maybe we need to change?"

Otto said department chairs don't have supervisory sway to improve performance; they oversee their department, convene meetings, and discuss curriculum.

Traynor said the department chairs and building principals coordinate the action plans and curriculums according to the test scores.

Board member Connor Kurtz asked the board to consider eliminating the Channel 1 morning television news program from the middle school and high school students' homeroom routine.

Kurtz said school districts across the country agreed in the 1990s to accept free televisions in exchange for showing Channel 1 every morning, but the TVs don't serve any other purpose.

"Daniel Boone has no control over the content," said Kurtz. "The program shows commercials of junk foods, video games, prescription medications, and how to write a book report by watching the book's movie. It's a giant, 12- minute commercial every day. We only have the TVs to show Channel 1. They're not used for any other purpose, and we don't need them at Daniel Boone."

He said Channel 1 is now banned in New York, many educational associations are opposed to it, and asked board members to do the same for Daniel Boone.

Otto said the board needs time to understand the implications of discontinuing Channel 1.

Birdsboro resident Thomas Schadt congratulated Kurtz for his recent graduation from Daniel Boone and recommended to the board that an article about Kurtz be written for the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA).

"We hear so much about kids not wanting to get involved, and here is Mr. Kurtz, serving on three