South Kingstown School Committee Meeting 11/22/21
Report from Johnnie Rodriguez

RE: Anti-Racism/Anti-Discrimination/Anti-Harassment Policy.

My first impressions from last night:

I am grateful that I got back by 10 p.m.

I am grateful that none of the "anti-anti-racism" people were there.

I am extremely grateful for the people who testified in favor it or showed up to support the Anti-Racism/Anti-Discrimination/Anti-Harassment Policy.

PRIOR to anything else last night, the SC voted to send the policy back to the subcommittee.

Here's some background for those of you who were living through your first SK School Committee Meeting:

In March and April, SK admin had their lawyers fine-tooth comb the policy and we got a final version to the School Committee in May. They gave it a first reading and, according to notes of that meeting, had "no comment." It was ready for a 2nd reading and a vote, right at the time that all HECK broke loose.

You may remember, from various times I reported at the Anti-Racism Group (UUCSC), there were a group of us called BIPOC Advisory Board* that had been working on policy issues since Sept. 2020. We started seriously writing the AR policy last December, under the guidance of Robin Wildman and Jonathan Lewis, of Nonviolent Schools RI. We looked at several AR policies from other states (including Virginia!), and though we took pieces of what they'd written, we inserted, deleted, changed words, added words — we worked really, really hard to get it right, as best we could. I barely missed any of those weekly ZOOM meetings.

Then came the REFERENDUM on the SK Admin. asking for a bond for new schools….but…. not being transparent during their process with the whole community and thereby losing the referendum by 2-1. In the course of pushing for that bond to pass, the Supt. was asked for a list of families to send out promos for the vote. She handed over a list to a "Friends of SK Schools" member — it turned out to be a list of all the students — it got sent out by an AFL-CIO printer (not sure why that was such a big thorn but the primary conflict point was using the kids to lobby for something).

Thus…the SK town manager resigned; the SK superintendent resigned — she had a been a staunch advocate of the AR policy, BTW — and in the midst of that turmoil, Nicole Solas began to write emails to Robin Wildman (she'd heard about our group), to the SK admin, to each of the SC members, in each note of hers threatening legal action against all of them and making other threats that have never been revealed. BUT…two SC members resigned, leaving open Chair and Co-Chair. As we watched, they pushed Paula Whitford, the first African-American elected to the SC, to become the chair, and her exact opposite, the conservative Michelle Broussard, to be her co-chair. A set-up, as you witnessed last night.

Paula told us at the subcommittee meeting last week that she would bring the policy to the floor with NO language changes. Various sources got to her, and she brought up it up quickly and sent it back to the subcommittee. She had been a member of the BIPOC (now Beloved Community) Advisory Board off and on, until she got chosen to be Chair. Now, she seems to toe a “protocol” line — whereas we had Katie M, Melissa Boyd and Christie Fish speaking out for us to have extensions to speak last night.

I’m grateful and glad that we got to speak (despite my fumbles, through my anger at them). I was proud of the policy and proud of everyone from our group who spoke and all others who spoke. THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

We can only hope that the negative attitude will not prevail. There is a slot for 1 more “community member” on the subcommittee, but we looked at the list last week and didn’t see any huge red flags…the BCAB already has three slots allotted to us.

I felt incredibly positive about the way things went, despite the STUPID sending-it-back and doing WHAT to it? It’s been vetted over and over. Even by the Asst. Supt., Gina-Marie, who was speaking last night.

But, all in all, it was a GREAT chance for the SC to see how much support there was — among people who got up and said, “yes, I’m white, and I’m just now learning about this, but I don’t want my grandchildren to grow up as ignorant as I was,” and LOTS of other good stuff.

So — I felt proud of the turn-out; very proud of how many people praised the policy (I had sent it out for people to read).

THANKS to ALL!
Johnnie

Sorry for the long-windedness. I was asked about this in an email this morning, so I thought it worthwhile to write it, as best I could, to all of you. I’m obviously fired up and will talk about this to anyone! :-)