

## **Town of Sharon Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee (DEIC)**

March 10, 2022 Meeting Minutes

The meeting was conducted virtually over Zoom in accordance with Governor Baker's June 16th, 2021, executive action extending certain COVID-19 measures adopted during the state of emergency. The committee chair Kiana Pierre-Louis started by welcoming everyone and calling all committee members and liaisons to confirm their attendance.

### **Attendance:**

Kiana Pierre-Louis - chair, present  
Dru Ledbetter - vice chair, not present  
Wendy Alexis-Janvier -not present  
Bill Kondrath – not present (joined after roll call)  
Marjorie Mitlin - present  
Zainab Mohamed - present  
Lajos Kamocsay - present  
Toben Asklar- present  
Scott Leonard – Sharon Police Department Liaison, present  
Tanya Lewis– School Committee Liaison, present  
Hanna Switekowski - Select Board Liaison, not present (joined after roll call)

Note taker assigned: Toben Asklar

### **Approval of previous meeting minutes:**

January 10, 2022: meeting minutes taken by Zainab Mohamed. Chair Pierre Louis asked for a motion to approve with a small correction of spelling errors by Mrs. Mohamed. Marjorie Mitlin moved to accept the minutes; Lajos Kamocsay seconded the motion. Marjorie Mitlin, Kiana Pierre-Louis, Lajos Kamocsay, Zainab Mohamed, and Toben Asklar all voted YES, and the minutes were approved.

### **Email Correspondence:**

Kiana Pierre-Louis provided a summary of correspondence received by the DEI committee. Email were as follows:  
from the LGBTQ+ Workgroup with slides from the February presentation  
from Select board Liaison with information about an anti-Semitism summit  
about the Len Woburst Sustainability Award seeking applicants in Sharon  
about the Brave Space Book club starting in the Sharon Public Library, books regarding diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility free to all members of the Sharon Public Library  
email asking DEIC to address the anti-Semitic incident at the Sharon High School

### **Discussing Bias and Discrimination in Sharon Public Schools:**

Chair Kiana Pierre-Louis opened with a welcome to Assistant Superintendent of Sharon Public Schools Meg Dussault for joining in the discussion of recent incidents at Sharon High School and Sharon Middle School and at the Sharon elementary schools. Chair Pierre-Louis also recognized DEIC Liaison and School Committee Chair

Tanya Lewis as part of a collaborative conversation, which included voices from the school administration, school committee, and the DEIC. The DEIC would like to assist the schools as an advisory committee.

Background/Context Statement of the events of Bias and Discrimination by Chair Pierre-Louis: Two anti-Semitic incidents occurred—one in the middle school and one in the high school. Several incidents of racial bias occurred in the middle school and the high school, and one in particular at Cottage Elementary School. Those incidents range from kids think they are saying something that is not correct, to people saying the “n” word—a wide range of incidents, so the committee will address them all. There was also an incident regarding a student’s sexual orientation at one of the elementary schools. As a DEI committee, we should address these issues at the schools. We should not think the schools can do it without our help—from the committee and from the community—the schools cannot respond to this alone. At the end of the day the kids suffer and then the parents suffer from this.

Committee Member Lajos Kamocsay received notice of incidents from high school letter, and expressed sadness that these incidences keep happening, probably more than we know of. Lots of unreported cases. What can we do to help the administration deal with this? He wondered if there was a better way to let students know how to use the incident reporting system in place at SPS?

Chair Pierre-Louis asked Assistant Superintendent Dr. Meg Dussault about the current reporting form. Dr. Dussault pointed to the INCIDENT REPORTING FORM, which can be used for anything: bias, harassment, discrimination, etc. Access online, paper copies at office or teachers. We have work to do, she acknowledged. Students hear of it at orientations in sixth grade and ninth grade and in health classes in eighth grade and tenth grade.

Chair Pierre-Louis asked about Elementary School reporting? Dr. Dussault responded she does get reports, saying most are from parents. Or she gets them from teachers. Teachers report what students tell them and parents report what their kids tell them, typically.

Chair Pierre-Louis asked Sharon Police Department Liaison Lieutenant Scott Leonard about ongoing SPD investigation of both the high school and middle school incident.

Mr. Kamocsay asked if the form is anonymous. Dr. Dussault said yes. Students are aware and there is a way for IT to backchannel identity in the case of immanent self-harm. There is a level of exposure, too.

Committee Member Marjorie Mitlin brought up former high school Harassment Team made up of teachers and clinical people open to students who were made to feel uncomfortable by another student they could go to this harassment team to intervene. There was a pro-active process. 75 incidents in a year, but things were responded to quickly. Perceived as a learning opportunity, rather than punitive. One chance for offending students to change their ways, in confidence, and then it would go through different channels of discipline. Once we were made aware of something we would keep an eye on something.

Dr. Dussault: A lot has changed since that time. Legally can’t do things like that. Older system presupposes a “good guy and a bad guy,” We know now that behavior is communication and even people who are committing an offence typically are coming from a perspective of having an issue that needs TLC, so many layers to this. We want everybody to be an upstander. All teachers, staff members are mandatory reporters. Every school does have a Crisis Team (faculty, district-level admin) that covers a variety of things—accidents, loss of life, hate crimes, etc. SPS reports all allegations in PowerSchool system, and those records stay in system. Many incidents get dealt with internally.

School Committee Chair and DEIC Liaison Tanya Lewis: Acknowledged the efforts of the schools to address the incidents with some urgency with school-wide assemblies. Suggests a multi-pronged approach: if it’s in our schools,

there is something in our community. It's easy to focus on the schools and what the schools need to do. Broader conversation about what to do in the community and town because that will lead to prevention. At the schools we are trying to react. Question: What kind of incident engages the police? Incidents with the swastikas were reported to the Police, but the other incidents were not or we did not hear about it.

Chair Pierre-Louis: Last year when "n" word was written on Cottage Elementary, now Chief Coffey and DEI had conversation about Hate speech vs. other speech. And the laws around that.

Liaison Lieutenant Leonard: The schools/admin immediately contact Officer Hocking and the police department, but SPD can't control what schools report. Officer Hocking gives guidance to schools about what needs to be reported. Difficult investigation of high school. No cameras in bathroom. It's a very difficult crime to solve unless someone comes forward to report it. We also have crime reporting that's anonymous online. People just have to have the courage to do so.

Dr. Dussault: when someone utters the "n" word, for example, you can confront the perpetrator. Whereas graffiti wasn't observed. Things are reported out to the community because we need help. Sometimes admin knows the people involved and are handling it. Often there is a sub layer to that regarding the anonymity of the crime.

Chair Pierre-Louis: A question to Dr. Dussault—Something reported anonymously via Incident Reporting Form would then get reported to the Police? Dr. Dussault replied yes.

Committee Member Toben Askar: Is there a way to make the Incident Reporting Form button more noticeable on district and school websites?

Dr. Dussault: Yes we can make it more visible. Highlight reminder in the Dispatch. She will try all of it.

Mx. Askar: Do we gather data from Incident Reporting Form and does that help us in terms of understanding our situation in terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Dr. Dussault: Yes. She can access how many incidents of bias reported. And she can differentiate based on racial backgrounds, etc. That information is "at the ready."

Committee Member Zainab Mohamed: Interested in reparations. How have the schools addressed it? Are the teachers trained in dealing with these situations? What are the school assemblies like? What kinds of conversations are happening, what kind of preventions? And not just sign a sheet at the beginning of the school year similar to the media policy or reading the Student Handbook. Learning that would build over time that behaviors to prevent this from happening again. Prevention technique.

Dr. Dussault: Prevention is broad. One method does not cover it all. Entry points into learning this information happen when students get their handbooks, for example. Teachers sign off after completing trainings each year. Compliance level. Workshop models, engagement lessons, morning meetings, curriculum itself, discussions. Families are involved, accountability from them when something happens. When can't just do one thing. We have a consistent message that goes home: We all are teaching in our homes. Former curriculum facing history; facing ourselves had a lasting impact on some former students, how to be a citizen in this community. Some faculty members working on restorative justice practices. Conversations like this one are essential.

Chair Pierre-Louis: Summarized points about prevention, and School Committee Chair Lewis' point that it is not just the schools, but it is a town issue and the DEIC sits as an advisory committee to the Select Board so we can advise town boards. Question: What can WE do to help? It's not just school's problem. Shared ideas about ways to highlight Incident Reporting Form in Dispatch, principals' newsletters, PTOs. Ways to get to community.

Dr. Dussault: There's so much we can do as motivated community members. Having opportunities to interact with each other like Mrs. Mohamed's cultural fair before the pandemic shutdown. Idea of being in our own homes, bringing that respect of home to the larger community. Conversations and offerings. Shutting down trouble on social media. Better good news stories. Mrs. Leonard's column "Good News." Where do we go for good news. How do we have productive good news conversations? Flooding airways with messages we want.

Community Member Ron Goodman: Thank you for volunteering on an important committee. Addressing the swastikas that have been in the schools in the last few weeks. Reporting, prosecution is beside the point—when you see a swastika in a bathroom or anywhere else in town, it's an act of anti-Semitism. Not bias, not discrimination. It's anti-Semitism and you have to use that term, anti-Semitism. It's a specific act against a specific group and it should be called what it is. High school and middle school e-mails that were sent out regarding the swastikas in the bathrooms did not describe either incident as anti-Semitism. SPD called the high school incident anti-Semitism on its webpage because that's what it is. Call it what it is.

Chair Pierre-Louis: Agreed with Mr. Goodman and did refer to the incidents at both the middle school and the high school as anti-Semitism. There have also been incidents of racial bias. This month has been horrible for a lot of people: racist, anti-Semitic, homophobic incidents. The people that are being harmed should be heard.

Liaison and School Committee Chair Lewis: The School Committee heard feedback, and Dr. Botelho did use the word anti-Semitism in his letter to the community about the incidents. It's all bad and it all needs to be named. There's an inconsistency in practice. It doesn't always get called racism or homophobia—it's a learning opportunity. We have work to do so that all the groups that are injured, that their injury is addressed.

Dr. Dussault: Coming to a DEIC meeting and asking questions and holding the schools accountable is exactly what the community can do. Educators are often pushed into political realms and are often careful and it's helpful to hear that that harms and doesn't serve. It's a place for the administration to keep getting re-educated.

Mr. Goodman: In speaking with fellow community members about incidents, he noticed that anti-Semitism is often not called anti-Semitism, whereas other acts of hatred are more easily called out and named. He asked that we be specific and equitable in naming types of bias and harassment when we are upstanders for various groups.

Liaison and School Committee Chair Lewis: Question for Dr. Dussault, can she confirm whether concern about lack of use of the term anti-Semitism was shared with the principals—to really name it? Dr. Dussault said yes.

Ms. Mitlin: Responding to Meg and Tanya: it's all of us, it's the community that has to be educated, so that the trickle down is something more positive than what we often see. Many organizations in Sharon like Sharon Pluralism Network to bring adults together from different backgrounds to chip away at this. The problem is the same people show up to the programs. How do we get more people to come to these programs so that their fears and bias can be chipped away at in a good way if they have exposure to different kinds of people? Different organizations including SPN and SREA and other organizations are trying to do that on a community level.

Liaison and School Committee Chair Lewis: Try to do events with critical mass, like annual Sharon Day, with really good attendance. Opportunity to address the masses. Community days. More opportunities to socialize together. Not necessarily about a message being sent. When people get to know each other that's where you break down the bias. Used to be activities at the park where people got together. Sponsored programming like town picnic. Speak outs, speakers.

Ms. Mitlin: May 22, 4-6 p.m. Sunday Supper for Town of Sharon residents to get together at Sharon Community Center. BYO dinner, potluck dessert. Sponsored by Sharon Pluralism Network. SC Chair Lewis asks to forward

information to Adam Shain on School Committee, Dr. Dussault for Dispatch, and SCTV. Mx. Asklar will send flier from Sunday Supper committee.

Community Member Darly Mevs: Regarding incident reporting, appreciated Ms. Mitlin's Harassment Team model. Students felt safe coming to the team. That is what may be missing from the incident reporting system that we have in place now. We're competing with the idea of not snitching. A lot of students seeing things but unwilling to appear to be snitching. We have to address that. We have to get to a point where it is a part of the community, it's not snitching but trying to make the community better overall. We can put it at the top of the website, we can talk about at every discussion with students—if they view it as snitching on others, even if they are hurting inside, they won't use it. Regarding Crime vs. No-Crime aspect of these incidents—if we don't know who the perpetrator is, we report it to police, then the person will be prosecuted. For the other incidents where they know who the perpetrator is, she's assuming that's not a crime and that's being dealt with and address with differently (whether that's racism or anti-Semitism). It's important we treat all of this through the same lens. It seems like if they are out and open with their anti-Semitism, racism, their homophobia, they somehow get a different path.

Liaison Lieutenant Leonard: What gets reported to SPD gets investigated. If SPS finds who is responsible, if it is a juvenile, they do not release that information to the public. Juvenile justice differs from adult justice.

Ms. Mevs: Clarifies she wants to know what happens after the SPD figures out who did it. Does it go back to the schools for the schools to address it or does something else happen?

Liaison Lieutenant Leonard: Depending on the situation, depending on the incident it can go to the court. We can charge the juvenile if they are over 12 years old if that's the route we want to go, or we can send it back to the schools for school punishment, which can be more severe than the court. The juvenile court system is more about an education approach to turn them toward the right path.

Ms. Mevs: I guess that's my point: you've got two sets of students doing two very similar things and one group can be treated very differently than another group. If we're reporting one as a crime we should probably be reporting all of them as crimes and if we are not reporting it as a crime then we should be addressing all of them within the school system. It's odd that some get reported with possible court dates and some get dealt with at school.

Dr. Dussault: It's difficult to talk in generalities. Everything is individualized. With hate speech, anything that falls in that category gets reported to the police. Regardless if it was observed or not, if it was a 12 year old, 16 year old we report all of that to the police. Depending on the student, what's going on and the investigation that the police do results in what are next steps: courts, return to school discipline, etc. It's individualized. Certain classifications get reported to police: hate speech, assault—anything that is known to the administration as a crime gets reported to the police.

Ms. Mevs: That helps. Follow up question: What is hate speech? And what is something other than hate speech? And who determines what's being said and what in fact is hate speech?

Chair Pierre-Louis: We won't get the full what is hate speech today, but we will address it in this committee. The SPD, Lt. Leonard or Chief Coffey will present on it soon. Overall, Hate speech is mandated federally and statewide. But you are asking who in the school is deeming what it is and that is a good question. Meg can answer that. The broader question and how that works we are going to address that at the table with a presentation.

Dr. Dussault: We're following the law as we understand it. We have to do annual training and sign off and be educated by our lawyers and people who deal with this all the time. It's not just left subjectively to us to figure out. We have consultations about that a lot.

Chair Pierre-Louis: I want to be conscious of time and I just want to end with a couple things. This is the beginning this is not the end. We need to have more conversations and I am loving that we have community members here because this is a discussion. Also this is a committee that was formed last October to handle these tough questions but it's not just the committee that should be handling it. The DEIC has addressed since October 2020 several issues by name. We don't always have an audience. In January when the horrible incident happened at Beth Israel, as a chair I try to make a statement. And I named it—I named anti-Semitism. We need to find ways to get more community engagement. We've talked about policies, we've talked about reporting, we've also talked about prevention. We can't stop anything if we don't have the community coming to the table to try to figure this out. This is the very tip of the beginning of addressing the issues. The SPD will address hate speech more, Dr. Dussault and Dr. Botelho will be welcome to have conversations about how to handle these situations at school, perhaps joint meetings with SC policy sub-committee (regarding policies on hate speech), faith groups. Just coming together and having a voice. And learning. We all don't know what we don't know. And we need each other to teach each other. I appreciate your words, Mr. Goodman, because you taught a few people certain things. I appreciate Darly (Mevs), your words. You taught some of us with your words. Chair Pierre-Louis extended an invitation to Dr. Dussault to continue to share ideas with the DEIC.

Dr. Dussault: Encouraged Mr. Goodman, Ms. Mevs and community to talk to administration. Write, call. Meet with her anytime. She is approachable. Her door is open. She wants to talk to the community.

Liaison and School Committee Chair Lewis: To keep conversation going the School Committee has a very active community participation base. Invite Officer Hocking and Chief Coffey to speak on Hate Speech at an upcoming School Committee meeting.

Dr. Dussault: Switch to live in-person meetings. May change the engagement. Need to keep heralding that these meetings are a place of engagement and open to the public. When it gets harder.

Chair Pierre-Louis: When is moving to in-person?

Chair Lewis: Governor extended it, so discussion will continue. Perhaps pursue a hybrid model to keep the engagement/access levels higher. She will share notice.

Chair Pierre-Louis: Will leave it to SPD and School Committee to arrange hate speech panel. Chair Lewis suggested a joint meeting of DEIC and SC? Since we plugged Sunday Supper earlier, I want to plug DEIC and Temple Sinai event "Shared Legacies" film and Panel Discussion, April 5, 6:30 p.m. In person at the Community Center. Our own Bill Kondrath will be moderator. I will be a panelist along with Rabbi Joseph Metzler. Discussion solidarity and rebuilding the alliance that once was. Mrs. Mohamed asked if students can attend. Yes, it is open to all.

### **Updates on Ongoing DEIC Matters:**

**Indigenous People Day on Town Warrant:** Chair Pierre-Louis reported on Monday's Finance Committee it was voted on and passed. Then Select Board on Tuesday also voted on it and passed it. So that is a bylaws change, changing Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day to be voted on at the Town Meeting in May. Thank you to Select Board for sponsoring it and the Finance Committee for getting the warrant done quickly.

**Update on Proposal for Social Media Policy Code of Conduct:** Chair Pierre-Louis reported there is a sub-committee. They have not met yet. When they do meet, there are 4 members, they will have an open meeting. Right now it is in draft stage in policy. Whatever they draft will go to Town Administrator Fred Turkington to look at and then be sent to Town Council. Then the DEIC will get final draft back and finally the DEIC will be on the Select Board agenda and present the Social Media Policy Code of Conduct to them. It is a multipronged approach. Sub-committee members are pulling language from various sources and researching now and working with what

Marjorie started to create: a robust policy. When the DEIC meets with Select Board at least sub-committee would be required to attend that meeting, though all DEIC would be asked to attend.

**Update on DEI Resource Webpage:** Chair Pierre-Louis reported Wendy and Zainab have been working on the Resource Page (Wendy could not be at the meeting) with IT to help get feedback on what they can and cannot do. They have been shuffling meetings but are hopeful to actually meet with IT. Zainab and Wendy as of the committee: Please send them helpful resources or links that you have seen that you think should be on the DEIC Resource Page. Once they deal with IT, they will go back to Fred.

Mrs. Mohamed: You covered it all. We're at the stage with IT where we sent them a mock page. So they are working on that and show it to us. They will work the technical points. Give it back to vet the resources that we have. Again, if anyone has any links, we would love to see them. I think it looks great. We didn't want to overload with resources. We have 12 or 13 now that are really good but if we were told some won't work—we'll see what makes things the most user friendly. Chair Pierre-Louis asked if there were any more questions, there were none. This has been a labor of love and a long time coming....but all good things take time

### **Announcements About Upcoming Events:**

**Sharon Pride Stage Events and Car Parade:** June 12, 2022, Noon, Memorial Park Beach. Mx. Asklar said Sharon Pride is a go. Still getting together people to plan more events. Will be reaching out to Lt. Leonard and Chief Coffey regarding public safety around the event.

Chair Pierre-Lewis mentioned the LGBTQ+ Parent/Parents of LGBTQ+ Students Workgroup will present at the next meeting.

Liaison SC Chair Lewis announced that next **School Committee meeting is not until March 30** as an FYI.

**Chair Pierre-Lewis invited Select Board Liaison Hanna Switekowski to speak regarding her post about the war in Ukraine.** Ms. Switekowski spoke about the pop up rally to support Ukraine that happened for 20 minutes in really cold weather in town right at the time the war broke out. She remarked about the connections the people attended realized while attending the demonstration. For some the war is painful because ancestors are from there, a Holocaust memorial was bombed. Ms. Switekowski has visited Ukraine as well, so it is difficult to watch. She's been able to keep in contact with friends there. She has been heartened by social media outreach to collect items to help Ukraine. She has seen difficult conversations for youth and elders that have been through so much. She requested to light up places in town blue and yellow perhaps to show support for Ukraine as other towns have done.

Chair Pierre-Lewis we need to stand in solidarity with people who are suffering here from Ukraine, but we also need to stand in solidarity with our Russian families as well. Because of what one person or a few people are doing does not speak for all of them. They are suffering as well. Sharon is a well-verse place because we have people from all over. We need to stand in solidarity for all the people who are suffering. It is all horrible. If there is another demonstration to show solidarity, let us know.

Ms. Switekowski: The last one was put together in a few hours. It was beyond freezing, very cold. I do hope the people who organized will consider doing something else. Wapole had an event on the commons. Griddle and Grill and Bread and Butter are really feeling the impact but are also running specials to help Ukraine.

Mrs. Mohamed: In the middle school they are going to have one video conferencing on the team my daughter is in so some of the Ukrainian students (they are not in school right now) can talk with SMS students, with translators. The kids here in Sharon want to show support. They want to talk to kids in Ukraine and see that they are safe. That was nice of the family of the social studies teacher to organize. The kids will got to school earlier to attend that videoconference. Chair Pierre-Louis cheered the event. School Committee Chair Lewis was proud of the schools for the event. Mrs. Mohamed said this is a way that the SPS are better and expressed appreciation for the SPS and for the School Committee.

**Ms. Switekowski: Announced Purim.** Probably see members of the Jewish community dressed in festive costumes next week for Purim. Jewish Halloween, Mardi Gras. Overlaps with St. Patrick's Day. People dress up. It's a fun and joyous holiday. Hamentashen cookie is traditional. One of the villains, Haman, wore a triangular hat. Ms. Mitlin said when Hannah said dressed up, she meant dressed up in costumes. Mx. Asklar said we don't talk about Haman. Ms. Switekowski continued saying many Temples do Purim plays or "Spiels," stories about the villain Haman, and the heroine Esther usually overlapping to a more contemporary theme, like Encanto. It's also a custom to give little gifts of cookies/sweets to neighbors during Purim. Chair Pierre-Louis wished for resource page to post events like this. Soon she said.

**Chair Pierre-Louis recognized Lt. Leonard for sending the email to her regarding the investigation of anti-Semitism at the high school.** She had not seen it yet. That's the communication that needs to happen with the DEIC. The Chair of the DEIC should be notified when these incidents happen since we all miss things on social media. Thank you. Liaison Lt. Leonard: It's all about communication. My email is out there. Feel free to call with question or concerns. We want to make sure the community is aware and communication is out there.

Chair Pierre-Louis: Thank you. It can be overwhelming sitting in this chair. And there were a lot of incidents. It's been a tumultuous couple of months in this town, but also all over. I have heard from principals, community members, a litany of racist, homophobic, anti-Semitic, I can go down the list... incidents that have been happening. We have to do better. Especially in Sharon, we have to set the standard for what it should look like. Again it's just the tip of the conversation.

**Ms. Switekowski mentioned the Lapin Foundation Anti-Semitism Summit Event:** Ms. Switekowski sent information to DEIC and will send to SC after Chair Lewis invited her to send to the committee to post.

Ms. Mitlin: Is our next meeting April 7? Committee Member Bill Kondrath pointed out that next meeting is April 14.

**Ms. Mitlin shared the Sharon Pluralism Network (SPN) is doing a Story Corp event from 10-11:15 a.m., and 7-8:15 on Thursday, April 7.** Three clips about bringing people together.

### Adjourn

Bill Kondrath motioned to adjourn the meeting, Marjorie Mitlin seconded. Approved by all members attending the meeting was adjourned.