

Building Blocks Workshop Review and Organizational Meeting Notes

Tuesday, October 30, 2018

Attendees

Oak Park Public Library staff

- David Seleb, Executive Director
- Jodi Kolo, Director of Communications
- Kathleen Spale, Manager of Collections
- Lori Pulliam, Director of Public Services and Programs
- Rob Simmons, Director of Social Services and Safety

Public sign-in sheet

- Mark Dwyer
- Libby Paul
- Carrol Smith
- McLouis Robinet
- Elizabeth Chadri
- Frances Kraft
- Cynthia Martz
- Deborah Baness King

Background

- As a conclusion to its July 2018 Community Building Blocks two-day workshop in Oak Park, the Environmental Protection Agency published a 33-page recommendation report titled "[Linking Community Building Blocks for Educational, Economic and Equity Outcomes \(pdf\)](#)."
- All local Oak Park elected officials, two-day workshop attendees, and the general public were invited on Tuesday, October 30 at 7 pm in the Main Library Veterans Room to discuss how, together as a community, Oak Park can move forward on the themes and recommendations outlined in the EPA's report.
- The evening's discussion was facilitated by the library's Executive Director David Seleb, who used the Harwood Institute's Innovation Space Engagement tool. That tool asks participants to answer questions related to a specific topic. Themes are captured by two different individuals not participating in the conversation, each using different formats: flip chart notes to refer to during discussion, and longhand form notes to attempt to capture more specific detail.

Opening comments

No flipchart notes for participants; longhand notes capturing more detail

The EPA report outlines these areas:

- 1) Equity in education
 - 2) Affordable housing
 - 3) A Food Coalition
 - 4) Transportation services and infrastructure
- For tonight's discussion, when asked if the group would want to discuss all four areas, or focus on just one or two, there was consensus to discuss two topics: equity in education and housing.
 - Seleb noted that tonight's discussion is about connecting opportunities and resources that already exist; not about creating new ones.
 - Questions asked and answered:
 - What other communities have done this? Succeeded? The EPA shared that it has completed the evaluation and report recommendation process with more than 50 communities, noting that implementation and success rests with the community leaders and stakeholders, not the EPA.
 - What is our working definition of equity here? Opportunities for every person to access what they need to succeed.

What are we learning about equity in education?

Flip chart notes

- Different understanding of access based on white or people of color's perspective.
- Educators have different ideas.
- Relationships matter.
- Racism is difficult to talk about and an obstacle.
- Parents advocate for own children rather than common good.
- We need to talk about the common good in a new way.
- The common good is also good for their children.
- Change has to be transformational.
- White students also need black teachers.
- Trying to fix the problem by fixing people not the systems.
- Majority population dictates rather than supports.

Longhand notes

- There are very different understandings to what access to education looks like.
- See from educators featured in *America to Me* that there are a lot of different ideas as to what to/how to approach, and all are not equitable.
- Equity is about relationships.
- Racism, whether implicit or intentional, is holding us back. Broad minded people get pretty narrow minded when it comes to their own children.

- We need to talk about the common good in a new way: personal > collective > personal.
- Bridging has to happen.

What does change look like?

- It has to be transformational.
- Black kids need black teachers and white kids need black teachers, too.
- Removes unintended obstacles.
- There are very intentional barriers from slavery, hundreds of years in the making.
- Well-intentioned people fail by focusing on people vs. structures.

What opportunities are there? Who needs to be part of the work?

Flip chart notes

- Tutoring/mentoring (similar to grant received)
- Race Conscious Dialogues (expand/need strategic plan)
 - Race: systemic vs. interpersonal
 - offered to faculties of schools and school boards
- How to identify needs/ask individuals
- Connect teachers with students and teachers with families
 - Relationships
- Circle Methodology in Schools
 - Different Classroom Ecosystems
 - Finding resources in community
 - (Becomes systemic; training, Dominican University. partner)

Longhand notes

- Educators have different idea about providing equitable access.
- Tutoring/mentoring programs to build relationships; those require trust.
- Race-conscious dialogs; these build a plan around “how do we leverage the asset of our whiteness and use it as a working tool.” Helping people see system vs. interpersonal. 4-week, 3-hour sessions allow people of the same affinity groups to work in a circle format. Not well-known yet. 100 people trained in Oak Park so far. Three current cohorts meeting Sunday nights in Oak Park. About 10-12 per cohort.
 - OPRF has something similar for teachers called “Courageous Conversations.”
- We need to make it about listening and asking; so we are not rescuing but empowering.
- Recognize the power of the circle: set up rooms differently; circles, see the success of Jess Stoval’s classroom (in the America to Me series).
- Exposure. There were 230 people at the high school to talk the first night of America to Me; 150 the last night.
- Finding resources in the community and bringing them together.
- Bringing teachers, parents, students together.

What is preventing that kind of work from happening?

Flip chart notes

- Education system fear of partnering with families

- Families fearful of partnering with the school
- Socioeconomic life experiences
- Building relationships among all community members (socioeconomically)
- How do we reach those who aren't comfortable with discussing equity?
- Ability to understand that racism is systemic

Longhand notes

- Tradition.
- Fear, of being vulnerable, of litigation.
- Oak Park is unique in that the students come from such different places; life experiences are different. OPRF = Oak Park and River Forest; two very different communities.
- AP kids are competing with each other. Not being as inclusive as they could be.
- The same people keep showing up. Preaching to the choir. We cannot figure out how to best reach other groups/people. The work attracts a certain population, and that often means we are all not at the table.
- One of the most upsetting takeaways from *America to Me*: a comment about parents saying they wanted students of color in a class so they could say their children went to school with kids of color.
- The reality vs. the myth of diversity, inclusion and equity in Oak Park.

What are we learning about affordable housing?

Flip chart notes

- How many people can afford to live here?
- Want to support education but tax burden is high
- 60% of taxes go to schools
- Education and housing are linked policies
- Scattered site housing not discussed as part of affordable housing

Longhand notes

- What does that term mean? Does it mean who can afford to buy here now? Or who can afford to keep living here? As a community, we are not necessarily talking about the same thing. Does it mean "I can't afford to live here anymore" or "we need to provide opportunities for all kinds of people to live here." Because the definitions are different, the solutions are different.
- Interesting how the two values conflict; meaning I want equity in education (paid for by high property taxes) and I want affordable housing. Why are taxes so high? Because the schools are so good.
- Impossible to solve this without changes at the state level; systemic changes. We will need to work very hard from a public policy level.
- We have human capital here; and we support fair housing. Yet compare Oak Park to Evanston, which is a city and has wards with representatives, aldermen.
- The affordable housing conversation feels more murky, and is also influenced by racism.
 - For example, OPRF residency policies have tremendous resources spent to enforce. And homeless students have rights. Very draining, demeaning problematic situation.

What are the opportunities and who needs to be a part of the work?

Flip chart notes

- Need experts/partners for meaningful conversations
- Housing tied to public policy
- Housing has significant influence on people's lives
- Proof of residency for students at OPRF
(individual reporting) (town of residency when become homeless)
- Effect on those affected and their education

Longhand notes

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What do we need to do to advance, and to get more stakeholders into the conversation?

No flip chart notes; longhand notes

- Build trust between collaborators.
- Start small with individual relationships. Yet we hear, "we have no funder support, no board support."
- Leverage resources we have to achieve what we can achieve.