Lunch Talk Meeting: Math & Science February 10, 2016

Teachers in Attendance: Josh Paris, Ed Wiser, Scott Butchart, Deb Holman, Meghan Kennedy-Justice,

Kathryn Kanter-Caruso, Brad Kozel, Mary Angione, Adam Wolf, Steve Lantos

Approximately 50 students attended the discussion

Student Comments

* There are no teachers of color in the science department
* Highest level courses in math and science are dominated by white males
* There is lots of tracking in the math department: It is challenging to move up levels
* Students at BHS do not like math
* Metco students can’t come before or after school for extra help
* Great experience in math: having Latino teachers in Geometry Honors and Algebra 2 Honors
* There is a lack of conversation about race in math and science classes

 ex: A white student in a 9th grade geometry honors class with grouped calculus project students of color was never told about the racial makeup of the class

* There is a lack of sensitivity around cultural holidays
* Students need to be in Russian School of Math in order to be in advanced math
* Girls are not being recommended for honors classes as much as boys
* The requirement that students purchase a graphing calculator is a financial burden on the lower class
* At previous lunch talk meetings over 50% of the attending students were students of color. But this meeting is mostly white.
* Teachers have different expectations for students in honors and standard level courses:

 Ex: A teacher said to the class, “You’re an honors class, I expect more from you’re behavior”

* After the racial incident in Ferguson a math teacher said, “Math is important, but this is more important.”
* Teachers in math and science always put content first. For example, advanced and AP courses don’t attend school events such as day of dialogue
* Many teachers espouse the growth mindset. That works really well.
* Some teachers take off points for tardiness. That is unfair to Metco students who are late more often than white students

Synthesis of the Comments:

* We need to hire more teachers of color in the math and science departments
* We need to figure out how and when to have conversations about race in the math and science departments. For example, there are many math sections in which students of color that are in the Calculus Project are grouped. How should the teacher share that information with the students in the class? Ultimately, this is about the classroom environment and how as teachers we need to create a classroom environment in which all students feel safe and welcomed by the teacher. Perhaps we could lead a conversation with our students with the following focus question: “How does it feel to be a student in this class?”
* We need to explore teachers’ classroom policies and determine if any of them are racially biased.
* We need to explore ways to address the gender inequity in higher level math and science classes
* The math department needs to revisit our leveling guidelines with the goal of ensuring that students are in fact able to move up levels during their high school math careers.

Next Steps

Mr. Paris and Mr. Wiser will share these comments with their departments (math & science respectively) and lead a discussion with their staff about the concerns that were raised.

Math Department Debrief (3/8/16)

• Graphing Calculators:

 - Maybe we shouldn’t require them

 - Have classroom sets for tests and such

 - Use Desmos instead

 - The issue: Students need them for standardized testing

• Assemblies:

 - The impression is that math department doesn’t support students’ interests

 - Courageous conversations should be mandatory all day events

 - Some teachers take kids to assemblies if they feel that they have a way to respond

 - Can we spread out assemblies to different days of the week

 - Math has a lot of concepts to teach.

• Advanced Math:

 Is it a vicious cycle: Students take outside math or get tutors and then we feel the need to create challenging courses for them. So more students get tutors.

• What do we mean by teachers of color?

 - Just African American? Or do we include Asian American and Latino teachers

 - We should be specific and say what we mean about hiring “teachers of color”

 - The goal is to have a faculty whose racial backgrounds mirror those of the students.

 - We need to market Brookline in a “different way” to attract teachers of color.

• Conversations about race in class:

 - How should we address the classes that have CP students?

 (In the past those students have said that they don’t want their racial background to be

 be brought up in class)

 - How should we talk about the racial background of the students in college prep level?

 - We need education on how to construct such conversations

Possible Action Items

• Determine the accuracy of some of the comments made:

 - Are they accurate or perception?

 - Are they the overwhelming majority?

• Create a way to share that information:

 - Bulletin board

 - Sagamore article

• We need another meeting with African American students to hear more of their views

• Have AP Stats students do a survey after the AP test

• Establish school/university partnerships to bring teachers of color to Brookline