

Duluth Human Rights Commission (HRC)

Wednesday, May 8th, 2024 @ 5:30pm

Duluth City Hall Room 430

Public Comment will be taken in person. Individuals may also e-mail or mail comments to the Commission prior to the meeting; see contact information at the bottom of the minutes for more information

1. Call to Order & Introductions
 - a. Meeting called to order at 5:32 p.m.
 - b. Commissioners present: Commissioners Nomi Ostrander, Jen Harris, Marsha Lue, Frances Wittenberg, Tyra Jaramillo-Kraemer
 - c. Commissioners absent: None
 - d. Guests: ISD 709 Representatives: Anthony Bonds, Tom Tusken, Jacob Laurent, Nate Smith, Jason Crane, Jen Larva, Brooke Manon, Brenda Spartz; City staff: Ben VanTassel; Community members: Betty Greene, Kathleen Spencer, Chris Harris
2. Consent of Minutes – April 10th, 2024
 - a. Commissioner Lue spoke to change the spelling of the acronym (APITA to APIDA – Asian Pacific Islander Desi American) before approval of minutes; Commissioner Ostrander motioned to approve the change; seconded by Commissioner Wittenberg; unanimously approved
3. Agenda Modification
 - a. Motion to change the order of the current agenda to have the ISD 709 presentation first on the May 8 agenda before public comments to be cognizant of school board officials' time; Commissioner Ostrander moved to approve the change; seconded by Commissioner Jaramillo-Kraemer; passed unanimously
4. Presentation/Discussion with Duluth Public School staff; addressing disparity in suspension rates
 - To Note: Because this presentation is specific to the 2019 State of Minnesota Human Rights Commission citing a disproportionately higher rate of suspensions among African American students in ISD709, the State of Minnesota HRC requires ISD709 to annually report to the Duluth Human Rights Commission on this, as well as any/all initiatives taking place within the School District to reverse the outcomes of these findings
 - ISD709 Presentation – All presentation slides were provided to the Commissioners and all attendees were given the option to obtain a copy
 - It was iterated that since 2019, a lot has changed and there have been some disparities in data due to the COVID-19 Pandemic; getting students back into their routines after the Pandemic waned proved especially difficult for students and staff alike, but students are now leveling out regarding focusing on routine

- The HRC was told that more precise and up-to-date data would be available by early Fall 2024 as all data needs to be legally provided to the State of Minnesota by 9/1/24
- There are four levels of Major Behavior: 1. The teacher deals personally with the behavior; 2: Minor offense with the teacher dealing with the documentation; 3: Heinous behaviors such as physical aggression; 4: Unlawful behavior such as illegal drug exchange or extortion
 - PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention in Schools) – there has been an uptick in discipline referrals
 - OSS (Out of School Suspension) rates are going down; behavior is being tracked and poses as a challenge for social and emotional behavior cases
- Regarding disproportionality rates for OSS, Commissioner Ostrander would like a breakdown of the 4 levels of behavior in the future, for instance, what the total number of enrollment is at the point of data collection
 - ISD709 staff: Enrollment went down in 2021 and 2022 but is now rapidly increasing
- Commissioner Wittenberg questioned ISD709 regarding the 4 levels of behaviors and if all of the behaviors are reported
 - ISD 709 staff: Three-quarters are reported and one-half are not documented as major offenses as it is not required to have all of the schools track behaviors at this time; behavior codes can eventually be broken out in the formal data through a platform called “Educlimber”
- Commissioner Wittenberg wanted further information regarding the significant decrease in the historical data for OSS
- Commissioner Jaramillo-Kraemer asked ISD709 staff if cell phones are being taken away from students and through her own personal experiences at her place of employment, the cell phones may be needed in case of emergency or are used as the only point of contact during the day
 - ISD 709 staff: The students are not getting written up every time a phone is discovered, and students use phones in the hallways or during lunch; students still have access to them and could be available to use at teacher discretion
- Commissioner Jaramillo-Kraemer further wanted clarification on the code of conduct and if the same rules or guidelines apply for the same age or different ages:
 - ISD 709: The guidelines are broken down by age level
- Commissioner Jaramillo-Kraemer referred to PBIS and what kind of cultural norms are being taught
 - ISD 709 staff: Regarding cultural norms, a vast majority of answers were provided with student input. The word respect looks different for everybody, and it is challenging to get everyone’s opinions on how to tie in cultural norms with everyday learning and life; through PBIS, the school district is starting to reframe how to present cultural norms in practice
- Commissioner Wittenberg identified the tiers for community engagement and asked school staff if they plan to increase community engagement

- ISD 709 staff: Some engagement has been implemented with climate surveys with responses in the thousands and site-specific; certain events have taken place at school in which food brings people together and providing food increases attendance rates; advisory groups are being formed, tribal consultation was discussed; there is a possibility of survey fatigue and it was brought up how to further incentivize the community to provide valuable input
- ISD709 staff additional information: The ISD709 was awarded a \$300,000 grant for Project Aware accomplishments show that classroom calming kits have been distributed; re-training of social workers, counselors, and principals on suicide risk protocol; 3 yearly youth mental health first aid training sessions; referral of students to therapy services as time and resources are not there to provide individual therapy as needed. There are two years left in this grant
- Further ISD709 information provided at the meeting:
 - A gender regulation and policy requires adult follow-up but is needing further focus to remove the stigma and barrier for students facing the struggles of gender identity issues
 - The EEAC (Education Equity and Advisory Committee) provides equity initiatives
 - The school board is brainstorming alternatives to suspension programs
- Presentation Closing: Human Rights Assistant, Laura Laaksonen, asked Jacob Laurent if the slides and data could be emailed to her; school staff and Commissioners thanked each other for their time and work and moved to the next agenda item

5. Public Comments and Written Comments

- a. Written public comments submitted prior to meeting
 - i. None
- b. Live public comments
 - i. Community members Betty Greene and Kathleen Spencer asked what the status is regarding the hiring of the new City of Duluth Human Rights Officer
 - ii. Per Ben VanTassel, the job description is being finalized and the Human Rights Commission Executive Team will be involved in the job description review process. Ben stated that getting the position filled is a priority and once the job description is ready to become accessible to the public, advertising from the City is anticipated. Additionally, the HRC will spread the word regarding the job once it is open

6. Announcements and Upcoming Events

- a. Juneteenth 2024 – Commissioner Wittenberg brought up if Commissioners should participate in the upcoming events
 - i. Commissioner Lue stated that she has seen posts online that are looking for volunteers to help out for Juneteenth festivities
 - ii. There are multiple Juneteenth festivities planned for the month of June in the Twin Ports

1. Saturday 6/8/24 - Family Rise Together Twin Ports Juneteenth Pageant; 1pm – Norway Hall Event Center – 21 N Lake Ave, Duluth MN 55802
 2. Saturday 6/15/24 - Family Rise Together Juneteenth 2024; 12pm Harrison Community Center – 3000 W 3rd St, Duluth MN 55806
 3. Wednesday 6/19/24 - Duluth Branch NAACP 50th Annual Juneteenth Jamboree; 3pm – Central Hillside Community Center – 12 E 4th St, Duluth MN 55805
- b. Commissioner Ostrander provided information for Trans Joy Fest
 - i. Sunday 6/9/24 – Trans Northland 3rd Annual Trans Joy Fest at Park Point; 11am – Park Point Recreation Area – End of Minnesota Ave
7. Request for Agenda Items for next meeting
 - a. Send requests for agenda items to Laura Laaksonen
 - b. Laura spoke to the Commission to be sure to read the by-laws by next month's meeting; any edits should be brought to Laura's attention within the next couple of weeks
 - i. There is a possibility that the by-laws should be read by Commissioners over the July break and if any edits should need to be made, to make note of them
 - ii. Per Laura, per protocol, the by-laws would be read at one meeting and then voted on in the meeting thereafter
 8. Adjourn
 - a. Meeting adjourned at 6:34 p.m.
 - b. Next meeting is Wednesday June 12th at 5:30 p.m. in Duluth City Hall Room 430

Minutes submitted by:
Jen Harris, Secretary

The public is also encouraged to submit written comment to the commission prior to the meeting by e-mailing: humanrights@duluthmn.gov or mailing comments to: City Hall at 411 W 1st St, Attn: Human Rights Office Room 434, Duluth, MN 55802

Please note that all public comments are considered Public Data