

# City's diversity director works with schools to focus on inclusion

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FREMONT - Fremont City Schools does well with hosting cultural awareness events and including special education students, but could do better with diversifying its staff and providing education about cultural differences.

These are some of the things Chari Mullen, the city's director of diversity and inclusion, found out during a recent listening tour in the district.

Mullen spoke to the FCS board Monday night about what she's learned about diversity and inclusion through meetings with district teachers.

## **Listens to teachers**

She said she went to four FCS buildings and listened to teachers about what the district does well, in terms of diversity and inclusion, what it needs to do better, what needs to be eliminated and entertained general questions about the issue.

"We want to implement some diversity and inclusion training, in terms of microaggressions, biases and privileges," Mullen told the school board.

Mullen said she also wanted to implement Bridges Out of Poverty cultural training for FCS staff.

Superintendent Jon Detwiler said he went through that training 25 years ago as a sixth grade teacher at Otis Elementary School.

Detwiler said some of the best training of his career came from the Bridges Out of Poverty model.

## **Talks about culture**

"When this kind of came up, it struck me as a powerful model to use," Detwiler said. "It just talks about culture. Everybody brings that to the table."

The city appointed Mullen as its diversity and inclusion director in late 2019.

Part of her job responsibilities includes working with the school district.

At her FCS presentation Monday, Mullen gave board members a brief demographic breakdown of student enrollment.

The district's 2019-2020 profile showed FCS had 3,519 students.

Of those students, 72.4% qualified as economically disadvantaged, with 13.1% with disabilities and 43.3% identifying as students of color.

Mullen said she had asked Detwiler if the district can form a diversity and inclusion strategic planning committee of 22 members, with subcommittees at each FCS building.

To encourage more inclusive hiring at FCS, Mullen said the school district wanted to take a different approach and meet with administrators, like vice presidents of enrollment and education department chairs, at local colleges.

## **Next wave of retirements**

Mullen said she asked Detwiler about the next wave of retirements in the school district.

"What subject area are those teachers coming out of?" Mullen said.

Denice Hirt, the district's director of curriculum, assessment and staff development, said she submitted a grant application to the state for the district's Grow Your Own program.

Hirt said the district will be targeting non-certified FCS staff with the program.

If FCS gets grant funding for the program, it would support interested, diverse staff members as they continue their education and get college credits, with the goal of having them become teachers within the district.

Hirt said the advantage of the grant is that it would help people that already work for the school district and live in the community.

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