

NAACP, School District Meet to Talk About Diversity

By Deborah H. Marko
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VINELAND – Members of the Greater Vineland NAACP have taken their concerns about closing the student achievement gap and increasing workplace diversity directly to Superintendent Maryann Banks on Tuesday.

"This was an opportunity to sit down with her," said Richard T. Smith, president of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

The meeting, held Tuesday afternoon, was not an adversarial, but rather an opportunity to find common ground.

"I'm hoping she achieves what she is trying to do – the key word is integrity," Smith said. Smith was joined at the meeting by Nedd Johnson, Dane Barse Elementary School principal, and Emily Cannon, head of Vineland High School guidance department, who are both NAACP members.

They are requesting the district take steps to address why Latino and African-American students overall don't achieve the academic benchmarks reached by their white classmates. They also want to see more diverse faces on the district's staff.

Smith had sought the meeting in November, but school board President Frank Giordano requested it be delayed until after Dec. 15, when Banks officially took over as superintendent. During Tuesday's meeting, Giordano said, Banks explained some of the procedural changes she plans to make to the district's hiring procedures, including more consistency in job posting criteria.

Banks also plans to change the hiring selection process, Giordano said. Currently, a committee interviews job candidates and recommends a finalist to the superintendent to pass on to the school board.

Banks wants to have committees forward her a field of three contenders so she can choose a finalist to recommend to the board, Giordano said.

Banks could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

Having more diversity in the workplace "is a key issue" for the school district, Giordano said. Giordano and Banks requested the NAACP's assistance to recruit candidates to apply for posted positions.

Continued on next page

Smith agreed to do what he can to help.

"We want to do everything we can to help (Banks) succeed because if she succeeds our kids do well," said Smith, who also plans to address the school board tonight.