



TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes
July 12, 2016, 8:00 AM
Room 201, Westport Town Hall, Westport, CT

Attendees: Maggie Mudd, Brett Aronow, Susan Ellis, Harold Bailey (Presiding), Bernicestine McLeod, Zoe Tarrant, and Dolores Paoli

Guests: David Vita, Alison Patton, Savitri Horrigan, Sarah Heath (Westport Human Services Director), Colleen Palmer (Superintendent of Westport Schools), James D’Amico (Staples High School Principal)

The meeting was called to order at 8:05AM

Approval of Minutes: Maggie moved that we approve the minutes of our June 7th meeting. Zoe seconded the motion. The minutes were approved by unanimous vote and will be posted.

Introduction: Our guests were introduced. Harold mentioned the following topics for thought: what Westport might do with regard to “race”? What are we as citizens called to do when our country is so rent with division – what is our moral obligation?

What’s Up?: Last week was disheartening with our daily news feed of shootings in Baton Rouge, Dallas, and near St. Paul, Minnesota and represented the perfect crystallization of all trends – gun violence, police brutality, mental health, and vets.

We’re seeing the negative effects on students; however there’s no real conversation even in Westport to enable kids to cope with and to understand what’s going on. The national political situation does not help. Children, as well as adults, are probably feeling that “too much is going on”. Everyone seems to be retreating from even thinking about or discussing the situation. On the other hand, in the “people-of-color community” this is a much-highlighted topic.

Programming:

Playhouse:

Invisible Hand – a lot of work has been done in getting speakers lined up during this production run. After every play (except for the previews), there is an opportunity for a conversation with members of the Muslim community. Members of TEAM Westport will also attend as many conversations or talkbacks as possible without necessarily seeing the performance each time. A list of related books has been sent to the Westport Library.

Education:

We engaged in a conversation to reacquaint Mr. D’Amico and to introduce Ms. Palmer to TEAM Westport and to get an overview from them about their current thinking with regard to the Westport schools. Some points:

1. We asked them what to talk to students about especially with the backdrop of what is going on in the world currently and how to engage in those conversations given the current school environment.

First, the curriculum is structured to tackle complexity and subtlety; however it is difficult to schedule other activities because it always requires pulling students from something else. Also, the Library



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Media Center and the concept of the High School library are changing allowing more opportunities for open conversation. The library is a venue to confront students with information and to be used more during lunch, for example, for student outreach. No longer is the Library a place just to go to do something or to find something or to perform a task. It is not a quiet place. Now speakers can come in to the library and students can move freely. Students can come to a big round desk for assistance from teachers and for discussion space.

2. TEAM Westport works to make sure that diversity is a part of the programming in all organizations within the town. One issue in town is “the bubble” where race and ethnicity are not a part of the experience students receive. Students, teachers, and administrators of color are very much underrepresented in our schools. How do you get it to be different? What approaches make sense for the school system?

- Can we do something with other school systems? Connecticut has pockets; how do you create opportunities despite these pockets?
 - We can pursue Inter-district funding to bring together students from different districts.
 - Over a summer, we can invite student experiences that would not ordinarily occur during the school year.
 - We can be creative with technology and be purposeful about having interactions.
 - We try to encourage students to do things outside of school – we are not far from areas with diversity.
 - We can incorporate diversity in literature and help students tackle complex issues dealing with diversity.
 - We need to break the bubble by working with people from other backgrounds.
- It is difficult to recruit candidates of color; nevertheless, we do need a critical mass. There is a shortage across the state, but the state is working on the problem.
- How should the teachers react with regard to education about minority issues and information? This is particularly a huge burden for a child of color who may be the only one in a given classroom.
 - The Guiding Principles (Westport 2025) include the curriculum to educate white children on race and living in America and what privilege is. A bigger question is citizenship. We see how detached the “elite” segment is from the rest of the country further creating a broader detachment from social questions in general.
 - Teachers do need education.
- What are we doing to have students understand what it is to be American and be leaders? People are not focused on how to make a society for all people. Students should have a leadership role in society as adults, but may not see it as such. The purpose is to have students graduate who know how to become even better informed. We are always trying to find balance.
- The Guiding Principles encompass 21st century learning, i.e., global thinking, critical thinking, communications, etc. The purpose for these principles was to develop adults who have emotional and social awareness, are kind with sincerity, are principled in thought and action, and who appreciate learning always. We are now working on defining those and students and parents will



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work on them as well. Marc Brackett (Yale) in August will be speaking about emotional intelligence and how it can be taught. It is a fundamental part of learning and touches upon the culture of the whole school community. There needs to be a common understanding that we do not disparage others. Our goal is to graduate people who are the presumptive people in charge. Humility and curiosity are important in effective leaders.

- TEAM Westport can help as well as our other town organizations – police, clergy, schools, parents – as to how to tackle the objective of achieving our common goal. Discussions about racism and bigotry make people uncomfortable and are difficult to get going; however, they must take place. To that end, TEAM Westport should meet the new curriculum and teacher development heads.

Harold thanked Superintendent Palmer and Principal D’Amico for joining us.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:56AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernicestine McLeod
Secretary