



TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes Tuesday, November 5, 2019 Brooks Place, Westport Library, Westport, CT

Attendees: Althea Seaborn, Maggie Mudd, Catherine Onyemelukwe, Judy Hamer, Dolores Paoli, Zoe Tarrant, Susan Ellis, Rev. Alison Patton, Harold Bailey (Presiding), Bernicestine McLeod, Elaine D'Aignault, and Steve Daniels

Guests: Beth Huisking (Westport Playhouse), Brett Aronow, Ted Gilman, Jill Nadel, Danielle and Carter Teplica. Bill Harmer (Westport Library)

The meeting was called to order at 8:09AM.

Harold welcomed us. Since today is Election Day, educators who normally attend our meeting are in Professional Development Day sessions.

Approval of Minutes:

Susan moved that the minutes from our October 1st, 2019, meeting be approved. Judy seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous. The minutes will be posted accordingly.

Schools / Strategic Planning / Staples / Board of Ed

- Dr. Chris Petrella, from the Antiracist Research and Policy Center at American University headed by Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, will be conducting two administrator training sessions in the Westport schools on December 9th. Over 40 administrators are expected to attend.
- Harold obtained demographic information from Interim Superintendent Dr. Abbey. There are 29 FTE professional staff members of color in the Westport school system. That breaks down to 13 at Staples, 2 at Bedford, 3 at Coleytown Middle, 4 at Kings Highway, 3 at Coleytown Elementary, 2 at Greens Farms, 1 at Saugatuck, and 1 at Long Lots. It's important to have leadership in our schools in order to counter the perception that only white people can lead. Lauren still plans to do an Equity Analysis/Audit to look at differences across the system. This is very much in line with Dr. Petrella's expertise.

If we want to retain the staff members of color that we do have, we must look at our system's policies with respect to tenure, for example. Perhaps, affinity and support groups may be beneficial; however, a survey should be conducted to find out if there is any interest. Does the culture here value individual teachers of color versus having them feel marginal and threatened? Judy asked how many staff members of color we have had historically and how long have they stayed in our system. Danielle Teplica remembered that, as a result of the students' presentations at the Arts Center this past spring, the community was going to talk about solutions to bring about inclusion, but she did not see any record of that in the minutes from the Arts Center. Harold responded that TEAM Westport has been actively working on this.

- The swastika situation in the schools and the revelation that they had been there on walls for years has really troubled the administration and us. We cannot allow things like that to fester. That's why Zoe's and Catherine's work is so valuable. "You are a good person, so you are not racist" doesn't work with kids. In Dr. Kendi's terms, an individual may say they are not a racist person; however, if they perform racist actions that translates into racism. The new Connections program at Staples will continue and should address some of these concerns in small groups. TEAM Staples should also help.
- A letter went out to the Staples community re: guidance on appropriate Halloween costumes. Alison requested that going forward there be further clarification as to the language used to define the guidelines surrounding Halloween costumes in order to avoid potentially offending anyone.



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PTA / Micro-Aggressions / PTA Parent Updates / TW Book Club: On October 22nd, Zoe and Catherine L. met with the group of parents that evolved out of discussions about the TEAM Westport essay. For the first time parents are coming together to talk about equity and inclusion. Parents talk about what they are experiencing. The group was shown the slide show (What White Kids See) which opened up a good conversation with lots of good ideas and energy. The next meeting on November 11th will be a working group to take action on some of the ideas rather than just talking. Word of mouth is helping the group to grow while momentum creates the need for more frequent meetings. A morning meeting and an evening meeting are planned for this month to reach out to others who may not be able to attend evening meetings.

- Zoe and Catherine will be meeting with the 2019-2020 PTA Council tomorrow at 9AM to discuss equity and inclusion since we want the PTA presidents to be aware that this is important. The objective is still to have a TEAM Westport PTA representative in each school so that parents will know where to go when they need help. The PTA is advertising for those TEAM Westport PTA reps. Harold thanked Zoe and Catherine for their groundbreaking work.
- Elaine talked briefly about *Westport Together*, a group that evolved from groups existing in the Town including Positive Youth Development and the schools, that will plan youth and family programming in the community. The group will collaborate around programming, crowd sourcing, and resources. The PTA and non-profits that work with youth are also a part of the collaboration. Jen Tooker, Second Selectman, is coordinating. The Library helped launch *Westport Together* at the annual Mental Health breakfast. They communicate via Instagram, FaceBook, and Twitter and have open dialogue as to what topics should be discussed as a community. There will be a central hub on the website listing all of the events taking place. Two PTA representatives from each school will participate. TEAM Westport has joined as a community partner. *Westport Together* is meeting in November or early December. The TEAM Westport PTA work may be really applicable once everything is built. There will be part time coordinating at the Town level and funding will occur through grant writing or will come from other organizations.

Affordable Housing: The fact that the town is being presented in the press as being racist because, relatively speaking it has a low supply of affordable housing, has created a stir. Planning and Zoning (P&Z) has an Affordable Housing subcommittee that is meeting tomorrow at noon in Rm. 309. This will be a great way to get an understanding of the issues involved. Carol Martin (head of the Westport Housing Authority) and Gail Kelly (Fair Housing agent) are resources if someone feels they've been discriminated against. Here affordable equates to high density in people's minds, but it doesn't have to be that way. We need to address affordable housing using the anti-racism framework. Scatter-site housing can be considered. Funding needs to be looked at – whether private or public. An equity workshop around homelessness was just recently held.

- How does the Open Communities Alliance fit in with what we are discussing here and their conversation about the history of segregated housing? That group is looking at ways to have conversations about race affecting housing. They have a wealth of data about the topic and where affordable housing is normally located – usually in the lowest resource part of an area. They have a legal arm to look at policy and practice; they encourage communities that want to buy land either via a public option (which does not work often) or to build partnerships to buy land. Their next event (*Segregated by Design* at the Fairfield History Museum on Thursday, November 7th at 7PM) explores the history of land and acquisition and race as well as the history of affordable housing in Fairfield. *De-designing*



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Segregation will be on November 20 @ 7PM at Saugatuck Congregational Church. All are encouraged to attend both sessions. If people would like to work on this topic of affordable housing, please let Harold know.

Essay Contest: We discussed the essay contest topic. The committee will take the feedback and refine for additional comments and input. The last essay contest has changed the Town, so we need to continue that level of provocative, thought-producing issues.

Library: The biggest upcoming event is David Blight on December 5th at 7-8 PM. He will discuss his “big book” about Frederick Douglass. The book has great pictures from the 1840s and 1850s. Jennifer Keller sent an offer for us to buy a signed book from David Blight if we so desire; you can sign up on the Web. TEAM Westport is a cosponsor. We are still trying to reschedule Dr. Ibram Kendi for early 2020. Another book will be out in the March timeframe (a YA version of Stamped From The Beginning) with Jason Reynolds, so we are trying to have both of them come if possible.

MLK / Clergy: Carol Anderson, author of One Person No Vote and White Rage, is our keynote speaker on January 19th, 2020. In case of overflow, we are planning a close circuit connection at the Library. The sponsoring organizations are TEAM Westport, the Westport Library, the Westport Playhouse, and the Interfaith Council/Interfaith Clergy.

Dolores is coordinating a panel discussion at Saugatuck Congregational Church on November 17th @ 3PM reflecting upon the influence of gender in each of the three main Abrahamic sacred faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) – connecting ancient texts with today. Dolores stated that Westchester has a bigger population of Muslims and a tighter, better-established community than does Fairfield County. Three new mosques are now in Norwalk and Bridgeport.

Playhouse: The previews for *Don Juan* start tonight (the final production for this season). It is a good cast and a race-conscious one. Turnout was low for *Mlima's Tale*. However, it was a beautiful show with complicated staging. Students from five schools came in to see it. The Playhouse is pushing to expand its audience and the diversity thereof. Currently, the Playhouse has open staff positions.

Other Business:

- Thank you to Catherine O. who is applying for grants to support our efforts including the essay contest.
- The Association of PreK schools in Fairfield/Westport meet 4 times a year. Tomorrow Harold is speaking to that group at Greens Farms Academy to establish a relationship with TEAM Westport. They have reached out and want to focus on programming at the schools to establish a mindset around equity. They normally have a national speaker in the spring and would like to invite someone who can address this topic. They want to know what we're doing to bridge to the school system since many of their students feed into the Westport schools. Also important is what's OK to talk about with young children. At that age, it's particularly valuable to address the parents.
- We would like to formally present the definition of the environment here to the Board of Ed once the new board is in place and discuss recommendations from the community.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:50AM.

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, December 3, 2019, in Room 201 at Westport Town Hall.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernicestine McLeod
Secretary