



## TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes Tuesday, May 7, 2019 Westport Town Hall, Room 201, Westport, CT

**Attendees:** Ramin Ganeshram, Alison Patton, Catherine Lewis, Catherine Onyemelukwe, Judy Hamer, Harold Bailey (Presiding), Bernicestine McLeod, Dolores Paoli, and Zoe Tarrant

**Guests:** Lauren Francese (Westport Schools, Social Studies Coordinator), Rebecca Marsick (Staples High School, Reading), Julie Heller (Westport Schools, English Coordinator), Jennifer Bangser (Westport Library), Pippa Bell Ader (Sustainability Westport), Deirdre Teed (Parent), Lee Goldstein (PTA Co-President, Coleytown), Shanelle Henry (Greens Farms Academy), Michael Barker (Westport Playhouse)

The meeting was called to order at 8:04am.

**Approval of Minutes:** Catherine Onyemelukwe moved that the minutes from our April 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting be approved. Judy seconded. The motion carried. The minutes will be posted accordingly.

**Essay Contest / Recap: Microaggressions – Continuing the Conversation (Tete-a-Tete):** The Essay Contest awards ceremony was held on April 3<sup>rd</sup> and the students were remarkable. In addition, on May 1<sup>st</sup>, they read excerpts of their essays during *Tete-a-Tete* at the Westport Arts Center. *Tete-a-Tete* was a design competition displaying actual models and paintings of pieces (benches, chairs, etc.) to be specifically used for conversation. In a session sponsored by the Westport Advisory Arts Council, our winning essayists read excerpts of their essays about microaggressions to stimulate a conversation by the community in keeping with the exhibit theme of “conversation”.

### **TEAM Westport Book Club / PTA Microaggressions / PTA Parent Updates:**

1. The book to be discussed on May 20<sup>th</sup> is On the Come Up by Angie Thomas.
2. Microaggressions keep happening. One of the more recent microaggressions under question involves casting in the school plays as well as play selection. On Friday, we are scheduled to talk with the Bedford Middle School (combined middle schools now) principal about this topic and the overall environment. We'll invite curriculum coordinator(s) to engage in this meeting as well. Thus far, we have noted a positive desire within the school system to listen and learn..
3. We are continuing to meet with parents via the PTA and have started forming action plans based upon feedback and input. The next parent meeting to discuss microaggressions will take place on June 3<sup>rd</sup>. However, that date may change because of the observation of Eid. We shall continue to talk with parents to actively take steps and to gather information from the schools with respect to addressing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion issues. We already have some recommendations that can help address overall issues including staff training, the forming of affinity groups for students, having points of contact within the schools, someone who is focused across the school system, and the use of community resources for advice. The objective is to get something started and in place this summer.

### **Schools Strategic Planning / Staples / Board of Education:**

1. Dr. David Abbey is now the interim superintendent of the Westport Schools during the search process for our permanent superintendent.
2. Dr. Anthony Buono, one of our assistant superintendents who was acting superintendent for a brief time, is scheduled to speak with Dr. Deepa Iyer (Sr. Fellow at the Center for Social Inclusion and one of last December's Anti-Racism trainers) about training/professional development for teachers and staff and the equity policy audit for Westport schools.
3. Lauren and Julie have shared the winning essays with staff and have collected feedback to inform professional development needs. Teachers were reflective about the essays and know there is work to be done in and out of the classroom.



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4. We particularly recommend a superintendent search slate with candidates from diverse backgrounds. For the record, we have had in the past an assistant superintendent of schools (Cliff Barton) and an interim principal at Bedford Middle School (Dr. Bell) who were of color.
5. Maria Zachery, Lauren, and Julie will be attending the *Institute for Teaching Diversity and Social Justice* conducted by Shanelle Henry at Greens Farms Academy in June – a week-long training session.
6. Rebecca won the Outstanding Reading Educator Award from the CT Reading Association.
7. Harold is the speaker for the Rho Kappa History Honor Society induction at Staples on May 20<sup>th</sup>. He will be inducted as an honorary member of Rho Kappa at that time as well.

**Policing:** Harold represented TEAM Westport in the hiring process during April. Candidates were interviewed and we'll wait to see whether the process yields officers of color. Foti is now back from class. We'll work on getting the Leadership Council in place again.

**MLK Planning Committee / Anti-Racism Training:**

1. We held our first planning meeting for January 2020 yesterday. The committee is interested in having our speaker talk about voting inequities. The Library will do outreach. We have some suggested speakers and will see if we can get them here.
2. We are continuing the relationship re: Anti-Racism training and had a productive status update via webinar with Dr. Ibram X. Kendi and those who attended the December 17<sup>th</sup> class on April 10<sup>th</sup>. We are also in the process of setting a date for Dr. Kendi to do a follow-on session in the Fall for Town organizations as originally planned.

**Recap: National Anti-Racist Book Festival:** Harold attended the Anti-Racism book festival held at American University by the Center for Anti-Racism Research and Policy (Professor Ibram X. Kendi) on March 23<sup>rd</sup>. The authors were very impressive. All the past discussions as to whether slavery was “all that bad” are being disintermediated. Now historians are writing about the realities of slavery. One topic of interest that Harold gleaned at the festival was about white women as owners of slaves. Because of patriarchy, women were not allowed to own anything; therefore, they had more influence over enslaved people than anything else. *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* by Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers covers this topic. The next Festival will be on April 25, 2020.

**Library Partnership / Coming Events:** We have been providing input to Cody for programming opportunities once the Library reopens in June. In addition, we need to determine TEAM Westport's role on June 23<sup>rd</sup> during official opening ceremonies – to include an activity or a table.

**Interfaith Clergy / Interfaith Council:** We are cosponsoring an Iftaar celebration featuring a Whirling Dervish, 7-9:30 on May 19<sup>th</sup> at the Saugatuck Congregational Church. Please come out. Rabbi Michael Friedman and Rev. Alison Patton will be teaching a “Theology and Racism” class on May 28<sup>th</sup> and June 4<sup>th</sup> at 11am at Temple Israel. This 2-session class was inspired by the work with Dr. Kendi. Theology, racism, and antiracism is something that Alison chose to discuss. Last year the topic was gender diversity and theology.

**Westport Historical Society:** The Historical Society has documentation about women owning slaves. As for the installation of the brick wall with the names of 240 enslaved people (part of the *Remembered Exhibit: The History of African Americans in Westport*), there are 80 bricks left. We encourage everyone to buy a brick at \$20 each. The exhibit will close on June 30<sup>th</sup> with a celebration. The Historical Society is partnering with The Mary & Eliza Freeman Center for History and Community in a fundraiser for the Freeman Center on May 30<sup>th</sup>. Kimberly Wilson, a Westport resident, will perform “A Journey” in a one-



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woman show about African American women in history at the Bijou Theater in Bridgeport. Information is forthcoming.

The Rho Kappa History Honor Society and the English Honor Society can help us do research or work on projects if needed.

**Playhouse:** *"In the Heights"* is the best-selling production in the history of the Playhouse! The Freshman class from Staples is coming to a student matinee.

*"Skeleton Crew"* by Dominique Morisseau will be the next production and is about the last exporting plant in Detroit. The production features a 4-person African-American cast. It starts on June 4.

**Sustainable CT Update:** Harold and Bernicestine met with the coach from Sustainable CT along with Pippa Bell Ader and Sara Harris (Westport Operations Manager). We determined that the "equitable focus" was different from what we had thought. They want to make sure that communication about sustainability reaches all constituents in a community equally and not necessarily that we are performing activities that focus on providing a diverse perspective. We'll work to make sure everything gets worked out.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30.

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019 at 8AM in Room 201, Westport Town Hall.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernicestine McLeod  
Secretary