



Together Effectively Achieving Multiculturalism

TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes

March 6, 2012, 7:30 AM

Room 201

Westport Town Hall, Westport, CT

Attendees: Maggie Mudd, Steve Daniels, Catherine Onyemelukwe, Stu Losen, Judy Hamer, Harold Bailey (Presiding), Barbara Butler, Bernicestine McLeod, Stephane Kirven, and Dolores Paoli

Guest: Julie Horowitz, Open Choice Program

Harold called the meeting to order at 7:35 AM.

New Business

Julie Horowitz talked about the needs of the Open Choice program and how it is currently supported.

- The money in Julie's Open Choice budget is spent directly on the kids; her salary comes out of that budget.
- Some is spent for a late bus for the middle school and high school. Liability considerations prevent having a late bus for the elementary schools.
- After school programs, continuing education, parks and recreation summer programs, and the music program are other uses for the money in the budget.

Julie then mentioned some of the achievements of students who have been in the Open Choice program while here in the system and while in college and afterward, including Homecoming Queen, sports participation, and the high rate of going on to college. She will do further research to identify and document accomplishments of Open Choice students for the benefit of the community.

Support Given and/or Needed for Open Choice:

- Technology is still an issue since many of the students can't get the internet at their houses.
- Julie rents instruments for the students versus depending upon the schools. This seems to work better.
- Mentors help. One-half of the students in Open Choice have mentors. Should all have mentors?
- The late bus usually goes before some programs end which can be a problem.
- The PTA has a buddy system for the parents. Apparently, there is a new buddy family each year.
- Julie meets with the parents once a month in Bridgeport. She also helps parents identify services in Bridgeport.
- Westport wants all of the students to take swimming lessons, particularly during the summer. The Y gives a lot of scholarship help to kids and parents. More is needed.

Proposed Support for Open Choice:

- We have to have a dedicated group of people to act as a safety net. The *A Better Chance (ABC)* program has such as well as a formal board.
- ABC students also have host families, so they can extend into the community and are more a part of it. The following discusses what we might be able to do for Open Choice that is similar.



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- Borrowing some of the concepts from ABC and based upon what are perceived to be issues to be addressed, we should investigate the following with respect to Open Choice:
 - Form a 'Friends of Open Choice' group as we've discussed in the past.
 - Start by formalizing the PTA Buddy Program and make it a multi-year program instead.
 - Involve groups of families from here with the families of the Open Choice students.
 - Bring ABC and the PTA together to generate ideas. The PTA cares about the Open Choice program.
- Westport should start Open Choice students in Kindergarten versus first grade so that the students start out from the beginning. Are 5 kids the 'right' number?

Actions:

- We plan to work on community awareness of the Open Choice program to make sure people know about it. We understand that Westport students want the program to continue, as do others in the town. Already articles have been written and more are expected. The program has successes and mutual advantages to the students and to Westport.
- We shall consider how to address funding issues via fundraising and/or grants.
- Harold will set up a meeting with the chairman of the Board of Education, Don O'Day to discuss Open Choice.

Old Business

- The Education Committee and PTA update was covered above under New Business.
- The Playhouse Partnership Update and Programming Strategy and Game Plan are to be covered in the Program meeting following the TEAM meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:25 AM.

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday, April 3, 2012, in Room 201 of Westport Town Hall.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernicestine E. McLeod
Secretary