



TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes
February 7, 2012, 7:30 AM
Room 201
Westport Town Hall, Westport, CT

Attendees: Glenn Lau-Kee, Steve Daniels, Harold Bailey (Presiding), Patricia Wei, Jocelyn Schur, Bernicestine McLeod, Nick Rudd (briefly), Maggie Mudd, Catherine Onyemelukwe, Dolores Paoli, and Barbara Butler

Guests: The Westport Schools Curriculum Team –

- 🇺🇸 Cindy Gilchrest—Elementary Schools, Open Choice, Student Services
- 🇺🇸 Lis Comm – Secondary Schools, Head of English Department at Staples

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 AM.
The minutes of our January 3rd meeting were distributed.

New Business

Harold started by asking Ms. Gilchrest and Ms. Comm to speak about how to get something into the curriculum versus the one-time programming events that have occurred in the past particularly with respect to diversity – such as the Civil Rights Forum and the performance of ‘Prudence Crandall’. He set the stage by saying that because of the demographics in Westport, students’ impressions about people of color could be inaccurate.

Ms. Comm and Ms. Gilchrest discussed:

- ✓ Westport 2025 – Preparing students for the 21st century – in partnership with Columbia Teachers College. This creates a planning lens for teachers with 4 global capacities:
 - to look at real world problems (problem-based learning based on a mission statement),
 - to solve collaboratively (team work),
 - to do research with analysis and critical thinking (analysis, innovation, creativity),
 - to look at the world from multiple points of view (do role play to understand different socio-economic groups and countries).
- ✓ The plan starts with elementary school and consists of projects during the year. This is a key to having a systemic program that is institutionalized and doesn’t go away.
- ✓ Traditional literacy is the way you used to write papers; now digital literacy and contemporary literacy involving pictures and graphical images, etc. in addition to written skills are emphasized.
- ✓ The Westport Curriculum emphasizes diversity in authors in English class with the goal to develop empathy and multiple points of view through literature. Tony Morrison, Richard Wright, Frederick Douglass, Amy Tan, Anita Roy, for example, are included. There will be a workshop on Professional Development Day to look at diverse literature and another this summer to do the same. They will be looking at the effects of gender/race/ethnic groups/class in literature. One example is how race, class, gender affect the play Othello although Shakespeare is “white”.
- ✓ James D’Amico is now at the high school and is concentrating on the Social Studies curriculum putting more focus on diverse cultures as that’s developed.
- ✓ “Cool to be kind” – an anti-bullying program – has been introduced. At first, there was no diversity in the books that came in for the program. This will be changing especially since not having diverse books can cause bullying. Children perform better when they feel good. So it is imperative to make sure the materials incorporate diversity.



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Harold next stated that this is all well and good, but what has just been discussed was apparently flying over the immediate situation and kids here. Do they look at domestic and local areas and how people function within them? TEAM Westport put together a perspective for Staples a few years ago. Where do kids get a chance to look at what happens here? Students talk more about going abroad versus dealing here.

Ms. Comm and Ms. Gilcrest replied:

- ✓ High school students visit Bridgeport schools and speak Spanish.
- ✓ Grade 7 is the best way to address this via the social responsibility section where they look at what some problems are and how to solve them via problem-based learning units and solutions. Domestic social studies is phenomenal so should be interject some lens and emphasis on diversity there.

Patricia asked: What problem are you going to apply it to? Is there any thought as to how to look locally and nationally in addition to globally? How does this get filtered through to teachers and administrators?

Ms. Comm and Ms. Gilcrest:

- ✓ There are 45 teachers and administrators, as a part of Professional Development, working on revising the lens. Thus far, a teaching unit was developed from the lens – a 3rd grade unit on Native Americans.
- ✓ Global benchmarking allows a view of the curriculum through many different lenses.

Maggie commented re: diversity based on the reaction of students on the Youth Commission a few years ago. This group of students resisted and said they were comfortable with diversity and knew how to handle dealing with people who are from different backgrounds. However, Staples graduates a few years earlier had reported that they did not experience any diversity here and that was a handicap once they left Westport. Is this an emotional issue? You can prepare skills in students, but how do you get to the emotion? Kids are hearing prejudicial remarks made by schoolmates; Westport is not a modicum of interaction, even among the faith groups.

Ms. Comm and Ms. Gilcrest:

Students are prejudiced and can even be very dismissive against people from other areas of the country like the Mid West. Snobbery exists; also a level of emotional unpreparedness prevails. Sophomore year is where students try to find their identity. Ideally we would want a classroom where all kids would be open. However, it's hard to be the only voice as a kid. Students are the ones who are more hypersensitive, especially if they are the only one in a class. By and large the teachers are sensitive to issues and try to bring out various and different points of view.

Adults need to intervene; this should be part of the social skills curriculum in Kindergarten and going on up. When adults become aware, they are proactive. The English Department is doing an international segment and including readings for diversity such as *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* and *The Joy Luck Club*.



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Actions:

- ✓ Think about how to work programming around 'Raisin in the Sun' and 'Harbour' into the curriculum. The Playhouse is doing a video about the performance of 'Raisin'. The thought is to have something at the Playhouse to connect to the school system every October.
- ✓ Think about how to work with TEAM Westport.
- ✓ Think about how to keep bringing in students to Open Choice, especially this year so there won't be another lapse. Cindy will speak with Elliott Landon. There is no real support group for the Open Choice kids, so we can work on establishing one. The PTA does have Open Choice liaisons. Bring in Julie Horowitz again to talk to TEAM Westport. Cindy will arrange this. Also look at the problem with taking only one kid per school.
- ✓ Also, think about bringing in Open Choice students in Kindergarten. They have been coming in during 1st grade, but that's unfair and puts the students at a disadvantage since they lose a year.

Old Business:

Education Committee

Harold reviewed the Board of Education meeting attended last evening. The topic was the status of the Open Choice program and whether Westport is still committed to bringing students in from Bridgeport. Superintendent Landon says that the District is committed to ensuring that the Open Choice students who are in the system now (Grades 2-12) will go through the system. He is evaluating whether Westport will be able to bring in students to the first grade next year (2012-2013), having no students in first grade this current school year.

Retail Diversity in Westport

Harold, Barbara, Bernicestine, and Gail Kelly (Assistant Town Attorney) met with First Selectman Gordon Joseloff about the incident discussed at TEAM Westport's December meeting.

Action: Mr. Joseloff will follow up with the Downtown Merchants Association and possibly the new head of the Chamber of Commerce (Lisa Gray).

Playhouse Partnership Update

Harold, Judy, Maggie, Catherine, and Bernicestine met with David Kennedy, the Associate Artistic Director of the Playhouse, in January. A schedule of possible activities surrounding the production of 'Raisin in the Sun' this fall has been put together. We are now in the process of selecting the activities and inviting people to carry out the various plans.

PTA

The Education Committee and the PTA met with John Dodig, Principal of Staples High School, in January to discuss plans for programs with reference to his letter to the community about hurtful language that disrespect others who are considered "different". We hope to have conversations for parents about parenting a gay child. Also, we'd like to see some programming in the curriculum about gay children. There is controversy as to whether children can deal with the topic. *Harbour* is also coming to the Playhouse and could be a point of connection.



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Programming Strategy and Gameplan

- ✓ Harold will send out previous strategy plans (and past reports to the Town) as promised.
- ✓ Harold has been invited by Marty Hauhuth to speak with the Positive Directions Council next Tuesday about what it's like to be non-white in Fairfield County (specifically the towns such as Westport, Wilton, Weston, and Fairfield).
- ✓ Harold mentioned other groups that would like to know more about the Muslim community within Fairfield County.

Committee Reports

Everything is in progress and reports from the Education, Governance, and Marketing Committee were covered previously in the meeting and are incorporated in these minutes.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:35 AM.

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 6, 2012, in Room 201, Town Hall at 7:30AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernicestine McLeod
Secretary