

**TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes**  
**March 1, 2011, 7:30 AM**  
**Room 201**  
**Westport Town Hall, Westport, CT**

Attendees: Brian Fagan, Harold Bailey (Presiding), Catherine Onyemelukwe, David Levinson, Nick Rudd, Dolores Paoli, Patricia Wei, Bernicestine McLeod, Steve Daniels, Judy Hamer, Stu Losen, Barbara Butler

Guest: James D'Amico, Department Chair for Social Studies in Grades 6-12, Westport Schools

The meeting was called to order at 7:35AM.

New Business:

- What's Up:
  - Rep King (NY) is holding McCarthy-like hearings about the radicalization of Muslims. This may be less important now because of the revolutions in the Middle East. There will be a rally in Times Square this Sunday to protest the King hearings.
  - Steve read in the NY Times that the number of minorities in the better schools in NYC is below 3%. This is way below representation of minorities in the population.
- James D'Amico stated that the Social Studies Department curriculum has moved from a Western approach to a more global approach. Between 2005 and 2007, there was a curriculum review concluding that what's needed is to give students more of a global point of view so that they can appreciate the diversity of culture historically and be able to tackle issues today. Grades 6-8 will still take US History. The proposal is to change the high school curriculum first; middle school will be looked at later. State standards are being taken into account as well.

Western Humanities was taught according to a traditional curriculum and did not have the flexibility of looking at the impact of other factors upon modern times. The curriculum needed to be broadened, yet focused. Starting next year the following will be addressed: global themes, global interconnectedness, revolutions, and imperialism. The results will be that students will solve problems versus simply taking tests and will have assessments based instead upon the 21<sup>st</sup> century goals. An example of such a problem would be: what has to be done to solve world hunger?

Another big change is that this is no longer a Western-oriented only course. It covers the Enlightenment obviously, but it takes a look at how religion and science interact. Christianity and Islam are discussed and how they were global early on. Science did not begin with the Scientific Revolution, but in the Mid East. Science and economics spread. Students will look at the economic interconnectedness to Africa, for example. Religion (for example, the Crusades) opened up goods and services throughout the world. People have always been connected and it is necessary to show those connections. Every unit poses a contemporary question, so that, as discussion takes place, students are to ponder where they see this happening in the world today. The perspective is that it started then; where is it happening now? This approach will govern how the other courses are changed. US History is being reviewed now. The

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chronological presentation of history is no longer in vogue. The impetus for the changes came from reviews of the curriculum which showed that we were outliers among school systems by concentrating solely on the Western viewpoint.

Questions and Discussion:

- 1) The reactions of Staples alumni and parents to this approach should be positive.
- 2) This new approach should still fit in with standardized testing.
- 3) The teachers are excited and positively nervous. Professional Development will be provided. Parents and faculty were very excited when it was presented. The team is now looking at how to revamp the AP courses. The challenge has been how to bring in companion and related experiences to the high school and have them be relevant. The emphasis on global themes will open up additional targeted relevant opportunities for planning and execution of additional experiences that will inform about the elements of diversity.
- 4) TEAM Westport might become a resource at our discretion as the curriculum gets off the ground, e.g. when students are discussing comparative religion or the impact of a certain culture. We could provide guest speakers, artists in residence, etc. – with more possibilities and more relevance in this setting than previously. The Civil Rights forums that TEAM Westport conducted years ago did not appear relevant to the students. This new approach makes a lot more sense.
- 5) In addition, by way of the Staples community consortium that TEAM Westport coordinated, we talked about the need to have students relate to what's going on in CT and to subsequently let them understand what it means to live under constraints and laws as well as role play in social issues. These are key elements being adhered to by the group looking at the curriculum for grades 10-12.
  - a. Since students need to understand the issues, they are going to communicate directly with local and personal connections facilitated by technology. E.g., teachers can be in contact with someone who's working with refugees in Rwanda. Westport will be one of the first to implement this idea including Skype-ing and talking with students in New Haven. The same programs won't necessarily repeat every year, but with this flexibility opportunities can be better incorporated as they arise.
  - b. There will be more pairing with the English department while discussing social studies topics. The school system is now looking at putting together a book club on civil rights.
  - c. Curriculum changes will affect all of the students and not just a select group (e.g., AP).
- 6) One of the initiatives of TEAM Westport is to celebrate a more welcoming Westport. Our aim is to try to get students to face a more multicultural world by having them understand

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that their Westport experience is different from what they will experience in the future. We are ready to sign up to help. We'd love to do more panels or other themes. What can we do to help move this forward? Opportunities occur all the time, so as the work groups get together this summer the purpose will be to interject the possibilities. One is Vital Voices where people share personal stories about their lives. Connections between and among TEAM Westport, as well, and the school system need to be developed and encouraged and should be quite constructive.

Action:

- 1) We need to stay in touch in order to determine when TEAM Westport might be able to help as noted above.
- 2) We need to discuss recruitment of diverse teachers and administrators.

Committee Reports:

- Governance Committee: Al and Glenn have been working to add people to Friends of TEAM Westport to help coordinate the group and to firm up the organization.
- Marketing Committee: Nick, Harold, and Bernicestine are meeting with the IT Support Group in Town Hall (Eileen Zhang) on Thursday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, to discuss infrastructure changes. TEAM Westport's website is being moved to the town's new website and will now be an integral part of that site. Our new FaceBook page has some friends/fans. We need more, so spread the word.
- Program Committee:
  - We are still investigating the TEAM Westport Reading club that will target the greater community as well.
  - Our follow-on conversation will look at a way to tie together Zeitoun, Steele, and our panel discussion on whether Westport students are prepared for college from a diversity point of view.
  - Going forward, TEAM Westport might consider conducting a session tying the Japanese internment to current themes such as extremism, the King hearings, the impact of Al Qaeda, etc., what's happening in Northern Africa, e.g.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 AM. The next meeting will be held on April 5, 2011, at 7:30 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernicestine E. McLeod  
Secretary