

TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes
March 3, 2015, 8:00 AM
Room 201, Westport Town Hall, Westport, CT

Attendees: Susan Ellis, Brett Aronow, Maggie Mudd, Judy Hamer, Catherine Onyemelukwe, Harold Bailey (Presiding), Bernicestine McLeod, Steve Daniels, Zoe Tarrant, and Barbara Butler

Guests: Ramin Ganeshram, Savitri Horrigan, and Kelle Ruden

The meeting was called to order at 8:05AM.

Catherine moved that the minutes from our February 10th meeting be approved. Judy seconded. The minutes were approved.

NEW BUSINESS

What's Up?

- Ramin and Savitri introduced themselves.
- Harold announced that Zoe is officially a member of TEAM Westport now.
- Steve was mentioned in Dan Woog's blog *06880* for his involvement with *A Better Chance (ABC)*. Students who graduated have come back to contribute by mentoring the kids who are in the *ABC* house currently.
- Judy reported on the black history program she organized during February at Meadow Ridge.
 - The first in the series was the showing of Bill Buckley's documentary about Marian Anderson.
 - The second in the series was the showing of Fruitvale Station.
 - The third in the series was an overview of TEAM Westport presented by Zoe, Judy, and Harold and was attended by 50 or so people. They read from last year's essay contest entries and talked about the 'kids need diverse books' campaign. People were excited to the point of following up by looking for books Zoe talked about. We should speak to seniors more often. Seniors have a great connection to kids under 17 AND grandparents buy books.
- Senior Housing located on the Baron's South property continues to be a hot issue in town. The P&Z turned down an earlier proposal to develop the property but the proposal has now been revamped responding to all of the issues raised. The P&Z wants to leave the whole area as open space. However, in the interest of economic diversity and trying to keep seniors in town, senior housing is argued to be a desirable use for that property.
- Catherine mentioned the recent New York Times article about the Whitney Plantation in Louisiana that has opened as the "first slavery museum in America".

OLD BUSINESS

Education:

Essay Contest:

- We have a sponsor for the essay contest prizes – Sachs Walsh Insurance Agency!
- The submission deadline was Saturday night (February 28th). The judges will begin their review.
- The reception to announce and greet our winners will be held at the Library at 6:30 on April 6th.

Note: Last year's essay contest winner is Staples' salutatorian this year.

TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes
March 3, 2015, 8:00 AM
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Board of Education:

A Community Conversation will be held at Staples High School on Wednesday, March 25, 2015, at 7PM to discuss the “Fifth Domain” in educating our students – how to “teach” character or at least expose our students to experiences that instill awareness of and caring about other people who may or may not be like them. For example, what do our students need to be moral, ethical, good citizens in today’s workplace and world? What are their emotional capabilities in addition to critical thinking skills and creativity? There is more and more emphasis on mental health and security awareness, so we can certainly include an awareness of “privilege” – what it means and its impact.

There was an article in a recent New York Times that private, independent schools are hiring diversity consultants in a conscious attempt to create “community”. There is a serious need all around but this need has been embraced and is being proactively addressed by the independent schools. Westport would benefit from following this same line of thinking. Having more diversity and, at least, awareness about diversity is certain to be beneficial as we evaluate how to continuously improve education for our students.

Programming:

‘Westport Kids Need More Diverse Books’:

The committee presented to the PTA Council meeting and will be presenting to the PTA presidents. They may add some pieces to the presentation. The committee will explore other venues and groups as well and have some ideas in mind. Kelle will help get the word out.

As a widespread movement, Kids Need More Diverse Books is very powerful. We can in the immediate short term raise awareness about what’s included on our summer reading lists AND on our children’s bookshelves. Principal Messler at Saugatuck has a “Take a Shelfie” campaign going on. This can be furthered by taking pictures and celebrating pictures of diverse books on our children’s bookshelves.

“The New Jim Crow”/Justice Imperative Initiatives:

James Baldwin Project:

We can pursue showing the documentary about James Baldwin in conjunction with Rev. Alison Patton and the Saugatuck church. We may be able to link this with the *Justice Imperative*, but need to explore to see if this will work.

Westport Library Speakers:

- The February 24th event featuring Dinaw Mengestu was outstanding. Attendance was excellent.
- On March 20th at noon, Catherine will be at the Library with her editor speaking about writing women’s lives. It is Women’s History Month.
- Possibly William Maxwell – the author of FB Eyes (Princeton Press), a book about newly released FBI files and how J. Edgar Hoover’s ghostreaders framed African American literature and authors including Richard Wright. He will be on the East Coast in May.
- We can suggest having the Middle School book group discuss Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson.

TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes
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- We can put titles of books about diversity on the Westport Library's Teen/Young Adult web page.
- We can also include books and speakers (from Yale or Columbia, e.g.) that will highlight sensitivity to the Muslim community. People have a singular opinion of who Muslims are. However, the Muslim community is very fluid and there are differences within the community just as with other communities. Students and others need to understand that. One might be Zareena Grewal, author of Islam is a Foreign Country that deals with the insensitivity of "tolerance" and microaggressions, and how members of the Muslim community function within the American context given the general misunderstanding about the community.

Issue of Privilege:

Suggestions:

- Courageous Conversations about Race by Glenn Singleton is a series of lectures/discussions surrounding race and designed to raise awareness and engagement.
- Conversation/presentation about TEAM Westport at the senior center may be a venue to hold another discussion within town.
- The TV program *American Denial* on PBS is really good. It shows that it is difficult to coexist with being a wonderful person while also denying people of color. In the wake of recent events that have sparked a national dialogue, *American Denial* explores the power of unconscious biases around race and class. Using Gunnar Myrdal's 1944 investigation of Jim Crow racism as a springboard, the film shows how unrecognized, unconscious attitudes continue to dominate racial dynamics in American life.

Action: We can put a link to this documentary on the web and/or Facebook page.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:43 AM.

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 7, 2015 at 8AM in Room 201 of the Westport Town Hall.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernicestine McLeod

Secretary