

# Hamden High School (HHS) School Governance Council Meeting Minutes

December 21, 2020, 6pm (on Zoom)

**Members Present** (alphabetical order): Evelyn Cumberbatch, Darce DeCosta, Frank Dixon, John Donahue, Nadine Gannon, Imani Gatson, John Hannah, Andrew Hull, Elizabeth Marini, Jack Purdue, Nancy Restivo, Ann Stiltner, Greg Thierault

## 1. Welcome and Housekeeping

- a. Frank gave a brief welcome.

## 2. Status of New Applicants (Teachers, Parents, Students) – Liz Marini

- a. Open Council positions
  - a. Teacher Positions: Liz gave an update:
    - i. 2 positions were open; Ann and Liz worked hard to try to get more teachers; Andrew Hull and John Donahue volunteered and were present at the meeting:
  - b. Andrew Hull introduced himself: 8<sup>th</sup> year teaching, 2<sup>nd</sup> year at HHS; he worked with Ms. Gannon in New Haven in the past; his focus is in biology and physical science, but he has taught every science; his specialty is working with struggling learners
  - c. John Donahue introduced himself: 12<sup>th</sup> year in teaching, 2<sup>nd</sup> year at HHS; worked in New Haven prior to Hamden; he is the math specialist in math department
  - d. Parent Positions & Election: Liz gave an update:
    - i. 2 positions were open; 3 parents applied; Ms. Gannon posted the voting link on her Dragon Update and sent a 2<sup>nd</sup> email with update and link; now have 65 responses – heavily in favor of 2 candidates; voting will be open through 12/31/20; Liz requested Ms. Gannon to send out the voting links in her next Dragon Update

## 2. Approval of Minutes (September)

- a. Motion to approve the minutes, seconded, and passed by SGC to approve minutes from 11/16/20 SGC meeting; *Eve will email them to the media specialists*
- b. Frank emphasized the importance of reviewing the minutes and making sure any input is added and correction made before they are approved and posted

## 3. Student/Teacher Committee Concept

- a. Jack and Imani spoke: shared screen with Google Slides; looking to call the group “Community Connections;” this group aims to foster conversation and connection between students and teachers; discussed Mission Statement, Committee Structure, Google Forms to select topics, Committee Norms, and Meeting Logistics

b. Discussion:

- Frank – asked what is response time regarding any “to do” issue that is identified
- Jack – responded that group focus is on discussion and would give “to do” items to other groups
- Eve – clarified that in planning meetings Jack and Imani made clear that communication/connection is the intended focus of the group and not identifying solutions and taking action
- Liz – also supported that communication is necessary between students and teachers at this difficult time of the pandemic
- John Hannah – offered that the Connections program is where this could take place
- Jack – emphasized that this group will be more voluntary and thus students may be more active and engaged; the Connections sessions are not voluntary, and thus, students are more passive; also the Connections program has topics already selected that need to be “accomplished”; the topics in this group will be student generated
- Nancy – said that it seems like Connections doesn’t seem to work the way it was intended; she also asked if it is not part of Connections, how will they recruit students
- Jack – said that SGS student members can shout-out to kids in classes or also use Google forms in classes
- Imani – said that information about the group can be spread through social media
- Frank – said that maybe Ms. Gannon and/or Ms. DeCosta can “advertise” the group; he also wondered how students start a club
- Ms. Gannon:
  - said any student who wants to do a club can do it; a teacher/staff has to supervise it
  - would also like to have live email addresses; can communicate with parents, but not students; she wants to be able to email students directly and to mass email students; this is a budget issue, but she keeps adding it to her budget wish-list
  - said that what Jack and Imani have proposed is wonderful - students having an outlet to talk about what is important to them; she wants teachers and students to be part of solution; if they want her there, she will be there; but she is worried that if she is there, students won’t speak up
- Frank – asked what the next step is?
- Jack – said they need to fill out form to request to start a student club: when its filled out. the give it to a person (Ms. Willis): then they will start a google classroom form to start selecting topics
- Frank- wondered if this falls under School Climate Sub-committee
- Liz – said it can fall under School Climate
- Nancy –wondered how they will recruit teachers; she said it could be put on HHS website and Dragon Update
- Jack – said they might hand pick teachers to cover broad departments, but it could also be a flexible panel and they could switch depending on

what each meeting is about and ask certain teachers depending on what topics are selected

- Frank – will put this issue/effort back on the SGC Agenda in future to give follow-up on how this effort is going; he commented that it makes him feel optimistic and gave support to the students to keep up the good work

#### 4. **Principal's Update** – Ms. Gannon

- a. **Mid-term and Final exams**: said that HHS has been having debate about whether to have mid-term and/or final exams; Ms. Gannon has met with assistant super-intendant, directors of other districts, and has elicited feedback from parents and students; lots of other districts are not administering them; decision was made last week that HHS will not administer mid-terms and final exams this year; reported to super-intendant who will report back to the Board of Ed; a lot of other districts are not administering them; getting much feedback from many families about high stress and Zoom fatigue; so in this climate, the exams will be particularly stressful and difficult; it also means a whole week out of instruction; teachers gave feedback that need added instructional time; they want students to have opportunity to share what matters and to improve grades, but there are other ways to show mastery of the semester's material but it just won't be counted as a mid-term or final – it will be counted as homework or a test; AP classes will still do portions of the AP exams; she will be sending this information out very soon
  - i. Discussion:
    - **Frank** – neutral to mid-terms/finals; he doesn't see a difference in having them, though there are some parents who feel emotionally that they are the be all and end all
    - **Ms. Gannon**; lot of district questioning mid-terms and finals all together, not just in pandemic time;
- b. **Course Selection Process**; in English classes today; students helped put out information on course selection; students will work with families on course selection for next year;
- c. **Bell Schedule**; talked last year about various options (i.e. rotating, waterfall); have decided to go with straight 8; it is what students wanted, and it still allows for various issues (i.e. ECA, labs sciences); lunch time decreased from 45 to 22 minutes; feeding fewer students (200 not 400) in that time; allows for special situations like having an intervention in a class (could do a period and a half for that); this schedule will give opportunity to earn more credit b/c now lunch is a scheduled class that gets no credit; but, some kids go straight 8, with no break; this allows for interventions and for lunch
- d. **Return Date**: January 19<sup>th</sup> plan to be back hybrid & some in-person; it has been a difficult time to be an educator and student; she is enjoying popping into Zoom lessons to see the students
- e. **Accounting for Kids**; some administrators/staff, including Ms. Gannon, have been making house visits; kids can't believe her knocking on door; some of them feel they have lost so much time and can't get back, but they are working to bring them back; she is proud of her team as they are going above and beyond
- f. **Health Department** – meeting with super-intendant and safety committee every week; constantly being updated about Covid-19

- g. **Spirit week last week** – topics decided by students; gave out gift cards each day; not very well attended, but happy for students who participated
- h. **Honoring Kids**: trying to find ways to honor students: Student of Month, Honor Roll, National Honor Society, Sports/Athletes
- i. **Budget**: she will do all she can to fight for staffing in this year's budget; will request "climate" staff (HHS lost in-school suspension staff); working hard to decrease expulsion, suspension, and arrest rates; when she first came, one arrest was made, but not because wanted it, it was because a parent made a report; wants to develop more restorative processes; trying to be culturally responsive to kids

#### 5. **Board of Education Report**

- a. Frank commented that it has seemed to get harder to get someone from the Board of Ed to come to the SGC meetings to give this update; he said he will send the super-intendant an email and ask that to have a conversation about who can consistently be present at SGC meetings going forward

#### 6. **Council Goals** – didn't address in this meeting

#### 7. **Subcommittee Reports** – *Committee Chairs*

- a. Education/Counseling
  - a. Nancy – asked what should we be doing presently to make goals to try to achieve things, and whether to wait for new members to come before come up with new goals
  - b. Frank – said he thinks we should wait for new members (teachers, parents); then look at old goals and come up with new goals
- b. Safety/Operations/Communication – not addressed in this meeting
- c. Mental Health/Supports – not addressed in this meeting
- d. School Promotion/Climate – not addressed in this meeting

#### 8. **Old Business** – Frank asked if there is any old business:

##### a. **PADLET**

- a. Eve – checked in with Liz about the Padlet she created
- b. Liz - shared about the Padlet that she created; she said that it can be posted on a website and edited by one or more people; she hasn't pursued it any further; in the future, she could promote it on Instagram; it could also possibly get embedded in the weekly Dragon Update
- c. Ms. Gannon - reported on what she has done quarterly to invite positive feedback about teachers; she also wants to shout-out to the students; she has had some opportunity to shout out to some students; for instance, students are now hearing who has been accepted to colleges; she has asked Mr. Cocchiola to put together something for the students
- d. Liz – brought up idea to do a student and teacher PADLET

##### b. **Equity Issues**

- a. John Hannah brought up concerns about the equity in HHS's grading policy; he said that in 2000, the Office of Civil Rights pointed out problems many years ago and he recommends that the report be made public again and reviewed; he brought up issue of having an advisory board for the

SGC made up of diverse students or representatives from the ethnic minority affairs panel; he would like to see changes in the grading system to be more equitable; for instance: The HECA program offers college level courses, but they aren't weighted the same as AP courses, which are weighted higher and which seems unfair; there were significant changes made to the grading system a few years back without, he thinks, parent, student, faculty input

b. Discussion:

- Frank – wondered if someone from the ethnic minority affairs panel can attend the SGC
- Frank – also wants to invite superintendent to discuss these issues
- Ms. Gannon – asked for clarification of issues
- John – brought up that Office of Civil Rights pointed out that minorities over-represented at lower levels; had 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 levels; 1 & 3 grades translated into F grades when compared to other weightings
- Ms. Gannon – said these issues are being discussed
- Frank – pointed out that the guidance department has flexibility to push an independent agenda
- John – voiced concerns that guidance bypassed the building (teachers, students, parents) which is something that shouldn't happen
- Frank - will reach out to super-intendent – to have Q&A session with him
- Ms. Gannon – agreed that a discussion of grading needs to happen; she said that the district is really digging deep into work of equity and it is time to have this conversation; she said there are districts that have unweighted classes
- Nancy - asked to explain weighted classes
- Ms. Gannon - explained grade weighting in general
- Someone? – asked what process is to get into AP classes
- Ms. Gannon – explained that now the process is very open, whereas in the past, it didn't used to be
- Greg – commented that in his district all classes are weighted the same; doesn't matter level of class; he said that many colleges don't care
- Ms. Gannon – asked Greg to share his district's grading policy with her
- Nancy – commented that her daughter is applying to schools and many of them said they will recalculate the grade-point average based on their grading scales; so the school GPA doesn't really matter anyway
- Jack – said that many colleges will look at individual class grades and compare them to their average applicant

## 9. New Business

- a. Frank – reported that a town committee is rewriting the charter commission; recommended attending some of those meetings; next meeting tomorrow

night; will make recommendations to submit to the legislative council

**10. Adjournment**

- a. Frank wished the SGC Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays

**Next HHS SGC meeting:** *Monday January 25, 2021, 6pm*