

# Hamden High School (HHS) School Governance Council

## Meeting Minutes

January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021, 6pm (on Zoom)

**Members Present** (alphabetical order): Evelyn Cumberbatch, Darce DeCosta, Frank Dixon, John Donahue, Mark Gabriel, Nadine Gannon, Imani Gatson, Judy Goldberg, John Hannah, Andrew Hull, Frank LaDore, Elizabeth Marini, Jack Purdue, Ann Stiltner, Mark Zarrillo

**Members Not Present:** Nancy Restivo, Melinda Saller

**Guests Present:** Superintendent Jody Goeler, Lamond Battle, Loretha Felton, Katy Kiely, Kerry Murphy

### 1. Welcome & Housekeeping – Frank Dixon

- a. Frank welcomed participants to the meeting; glad to say SGC has all open slots filled, and he thanked members who helped recruit new members: Liz, Ann, John H.
- b. He reviewed that SGC made up of 7 parents, 5 teachers, 2 students, 2 community members, 2 administration members, and Board of Ed representative; there are various subcommittees; the SGC's overall goal is to improve academic efforts and foster positive atmosphere & culture in school; he welcomed all new members to participate in subcommittee of interest.
- c. He reviewed that last year the SGC put together a robust agenda; then pandemic hit, which caused a to shift in agenda and changed the conversation to student-teacher collaboration/communication, as well as to invite more diverse students

### 2. Welcome & Introduction of New Council Members (Teachers and Parents) – Liz Marini

- a. Liz echoed what Frank said that the pandemic made the SGC re-examine priorities and focus to make sure the SGC is supporting biggest area of need; it was challenging at beginning as SGC lost members and it has taken a while to make sure the membership is full and more diverse
- b. She welcomed the recently added and new teacher members again and thanked them and said they bring some unique perspectives on teaching and students needs (some introductions occurred at last meeting)
  - i. Mark Gabriel
  - ii. Andrew Hull
  - iii. John Donahue
- c. She welcomed the new parent members, thanked them, and asked them to introduce themselves:
  - i. Frank Ladore: he works full-time at SCSU and is involved in Hamden politics; he is on the charter review commission; his daughter is a senior at HHS, his son will be a freshman next year, and his other son is at Bear Path school; he has found working with town to be a great experience and he appreciates the opportunity; he knows various faces already and is looking forward to working with the SGC.
  - ii. Judy Goldberg: her daughter is a freshman at HHS and her son already graduated and is in college; she served on the SGC a couple years ago, and she has served on the Arts Commission; she is also the VP of Government Relations for the CT PTA; plus, she works for the United Way of CT.

### 3. Approval of Minutes – Evelyn Cumberbatch

- a. Minutes from December 2020 SGC meeting: checked if any final changes or revisions recommended; no changes voiced; motion to approve put forth and seconded, approved; will ask media specialists to post minutes to SGC website
- b. Will ask media specialists to add all new members on the SGC website

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

- a. She welcomed to old and new members and said it is an honor to be on the SGC
- b. Reported return to hybrid-model on 1/19/21, but had to stop the last few days due to staffing problems; met with BofEd to figure out how to handle staffing problems and have come up with good solution going forward; in-person attendance is still low, but continues to change daily
- c. Regarding struggling students; the administration is working to engage struggling students; many districts have same concerns
- d. Regarding upcoming colder weather, with Covid-19 protocols & need for more ventilation from outside, it may be necessary to close the school for in-person learning as it will be a challenge for HHS to keep the building warm enough; she is working with custodial staff to make everyone comfortable and will continue to work daily to address those challenges.
- e. Discussion:
  - i. Eve – gave Ms. Gannon positive feedback on her very hard work in difficult times
  - ii. Frank – gave appreciation for transparency and information to parents and families

#### 5. Board of Education Report – Superintendent Jody Goeler

- a. Frank asked him to update on where we are now and where we are going regarding interests of students, families, teachers, staff
- b. Regarding schools opening vs closing; district working to get schools up to CDC guidelines; for instance, providing maximum ventilation which means have to heat the schools overtime, and in temperatures less than 25F, the schools can't keep up and are too cold, so at end of this week, may have to close schools and move to all remote-learning.
- c. District is cognizant of families who struggle to set up supervision and a learning environment for students; the district is providing some childcare for families (some subsidies at 80-100%; more and more families are taking advantage of a safe environment (socially distanced, masked) at Wintergreen, Bear Path, and Church Street schools.
- d. He reviewed district's work to address Covid-19 pandemic since last year, creating a committee and various subcommittees; the Medical subcommittee continues to meet every week to discuss the latest data (positivity rate, spread, etc.); it involves the Quinipiac Valley Health District (QVHD), Cornell-Scott Hill Health Center, the Mayor, and a couple administrators. Ms. Gannon participated last week to discuss how to handle staffing issues. Another subcommittee is the Vaccine Task-Force to make sure Hamden is poised to jump into action when the vaccine comes to Hamden; it was thought that vaccines could be administered to teachers starting 1/30/21, but now looks like it will February or March, as the State gave 75 and over priority and teachers are in 1b group. Hamden is poised to go into action; 2 nurses who are experienced vaccinating large groups are organizing the effort. QVHD orders vaccines each week and receives the vaccine after approximately a week; they never get the amount they ask for and they have to distribute the vaccine presently to 4 different communities.
- e. The district continues to deliver and provide meals for students/families, and daycares and childcare.
- f. The district provided laptops to all children as well as providing some Wi-Fi hotspots in homes without connection. He discussed that back in January 2020k it was a goal to set up remote learning for snow days or intervention support and at that time, he would have given a goal of 5-7 years to do this, and yet the district went remote-capable in 6 months.
- g. He discussed vision/goals for future:
  - i. Not going back to March 2020; looking to take what have learned this year and technology deployed and planning to be in whole new place
    1. For example, there has been improved access and turnout to various meetings, and may continue to use technology to continue increased

attendance at meetings. For instance:

- a. Could designate a room in each school with web-cams and have on-line PPT meetings and parent teacher meetings.
- b. Can continued on-line Board of ED meetings
- h. He congratulated teachers and staff and said it has been hard to meet the technological challenge, but they have done a good job.
- i. He discussed that the budget is constrained in Hamden, which presents a challenge. For instance, the buildings are suffering from old HVAC systems.
- j. He discussed the Diversity Advisory Council, which met all of last year and created a robust policy agenda which was approved by the Board; the district continues this work; now working with Bridges Collaborative to connect with resources and support to make our schools more diverse and our classrooms diverse and culturally appropriate.
- k. Discussion:
  - i. Frank said he thinks that Hamden has enough money, but is fiscally irresponsible with the money and the resources are not adjusted appropriately; he is a super advocate for schools and public schools; he said that in 2021, there is no excuse to be in such a rich state and town to have chronic HVAC issues; he said we need to hold the legislative council to account so that the BofEd and administrators can focus on teaching.
  - ii. Frank reinforced the need for a BofEd representative to regularly attend the SGC meetings; the questions of whether Chris Daur would continue to attend or whether Melinda Saller, who is a parent member and also a BofEd member can provide this role, were mentioned.
  - iii. Liz thanked Superintendent Goeler for coming.

## **6. EMAC – Black and Hispanic Student Union – John Hannah & Mr. Battle**

- a. Black and Hispanic Student Union (BHSU): Mr. Battle
  - i. Mr. Battle said he is attempting to engage all students; the BHSU has regular meetings every other Tuesday on Zoom; the Covid-19 pandemic took away some activities, such as the neighborhood cleanup, but they are continuing some activities on-line, such as the Coat Drive, and Books for Village Project; they are planning for a Black History Month presentation; Imani Gatson is an officer. He said engaging with students has been a challenge; however, he tries very hard to reach them, to give them a sense of hope and encouraging them to continue to engage with HHS.
  - ii. Frank thanked him for coming; asked how he thinks SGC can help logistically to change policy or the culture.
  - iii. Mr. Battle asked for as much support as possible; they usually do the HBCU college tour, but the BHSU needs help with funding; whether face-book or Instagram; the BHSU needs to know have support of community
  - iv. Mr. Battle said that the connections between teachers and students are very important and anyway to help strengthen this connection will be good. Normally sports events are important for this as students like to see teachers at events and supporting them. So, finding creative ways to connect with students is important; he offered that anyone who wants to join in BHSU meetings can do this.
  - v. Ms. Gannon gave Mr. Battle much thanks and gratitude; she shared that Mr. Battle has been absolutely amazing as the BHSU advisor; she said he regularly works with her, at all times even weekends; he has made all the home visits with her, going many places to connect with struggling students. Those moments of house and home visits; then amount of time to circulate back to
  - vi. Mr. Battle said he will meet kids where they are, and he commented that “team work makes the dream work!”
  - vii. Liz said she really loves how open Lamont Battle is for everyone to join the BHSU

b. Equity Issues: John Hannah

- i. John H. welcomed members of the Ethnic Minority Action Committee (EMAC): Loretha Felton, Katy Kiely, Kerry Murphy (later, below, they were asked to introduce themselves).
- ii. John H. said that ethnic minority clubs struggle to get funding to help them open and survive; the funding is coming out of their own pockets and this raises concerns about equity and fairness; he said that there should be equitable pay for facilitators and more equitable funding
- iii. John H. requested that the SGC set up some kind of advisory committee to allow a more diverse group of students to speak about the needs of ethnic minority students and teachers.
- iv. Frank wondered what John H. envisions this would look like – would it be a separate sub-committee to the SGC?
- v. John H. said he is not quite sure; some kind of advisory board to allow students the opportunity to come and speak about being minority students at HHS; he said that there are very diverse minorities at HHS; for instance, Hispanic, African American, and Asian students are different; he noted that most of the students on SGC have been white and, while they contribute valuable opinions and thoughts, the voices of more diverse groups needs to be heard.
- vi. Franks wondered how this could be accomplished.
- vii. Eve wondered if the SGC could have more than the 2 student members presently allotted and have a student subcommittee to discuss the needs of the diverse student body.
- viii. Ms. Gannon said that she is always available to meet with students to discuss their concerns and needs; she could meet with them regularly to learn about what they need and said she would value the opportunity to address some of their issues.
- ix. Ms. Gannon also said that she used to have the Principal's Roundtable and Superintendent Goeler had students advising him. She said again that it is very difficult to speak with students directly without being able to email them directly; she would be open to meeting any group of students to discuss issues at HHS.
- x. John H. said that absolutely Ms. Gannon can be in the loop, but noted that the SGC is one additional place where minority students can voice their needs.
- xii.** Frank asked again for John H. to send his ideas to him and Liz as to what he envisions this increased participation by minority students in the SGC might look like.
- xii. Frank asked for the guest EMAC members to introduce themselves:
  1. Kerry Murphy said she has been in the district for 5 years and is in special education at HHS.
  2. Loretha Felton is a social worker in the Hamden Public schools; she named a number of groups (CEA? and EEA? and EMAC) she is involved with to encourage student and staff engagement and to collaborate with all levels in the Hamden Public Schools.
  3. Katy Kiely has been a teacher at Ridge Hill for 14 years; she wants to make sure all voices are heard from the elementary level to HMS and HHS; she wants to let her students know what they can expect and what opportunities exist at all levels
- xiii. Frank thanked them for sharing.

**7. Student/Teacher Committee Concept – Imani Gatson & Jack Purdue**

- a. Liz asked Imani and Jack to give a quick overview of effort for new members and guests.
- b. Jack said there is a divide between students and teachers and he and Imani have been working to create a committee, Community Conversations, which will be an open Zoom meeting for all students and faculty to talk about what they are experiencing; the focus of this

meeting is on communication between students and teachers.

- c. Imani added that since the pandemic hit, it has been hard on students and teachers as they don't have bond that they would have in person; so this committee/meeting is intended to improve the bond between students and teachers;
- d. Jack said that he and Imani have been working to complete the forms to get the committee set up; hopefully they will be done by end week

Discussion:

- i. Liz wants to help increase participation in clubs and wondered if it is possible to have shared space on the school website to click on recurring clubs with possible links to join Zoom groups to engage in the club's activities
- ii. Ms. Gannon said great idea and can talk with Ms. James
- iii. John H. said that to maximize inclusiveness, would need to bring the Community Conversations meeting into building in daytime in order to get a wide-variety of students and teachers to come
- iv. Liz explained that Imani and Jack want to put it outside school time so it doesn't conflict with other activities; she wondered if they could record one of the Zoom meetings and play it during Connections to hear other voices
- v. Ms. Gannon said she is open to talking further about using Connections for this purpose; Connections occurs in period 3 all students are involved; for this to be a Connections program they would have to define what it is about
- vi. Eve said her 2 children/students have found Connections to be somewhat irrelevant and boring
- vii. Ms. Gannon said it Connections was less relevant early on, but last year some teachers took it on themselves to revamp it and it became much better and more appreciated
- viii. Liz said that clarifying the branding of it Connections between administrative and advisory would be helpful
- ix. Ms. Gannon said they have tried to do this

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

- a. Liz invited the new parents to think which subcommittees they want to join before next month
- b. Jack asked for information on subcommittees to be sent out prior to next meeting
- c. Frank said that this was done last year and that it might take another meeting to lay out the goals for each subcommittee and could be done at the next meeting.
- d. Education/Counseling – not addressed this meeting
- e. Safety/Operations/Communication – not addressed this meeting
- f. Mental Health/Supports – not addressed this meeting
- g. School Promotion/Climate – not addressed this meeting

## **9. Old Business**

- a. Frank asked for Ms. Gannon to give update on college prep issues: SATs, PSATs, performance testing
- b. Ms. Gannon: said the school SAT will be held 3/24/21; all juniors will be taking it; it will be in-person via paper & pencil; they have had updates about a new science test for juniors: the NGSS; the assistant principal who is in charge of this testing just participated in a webinar about it; it will also take place in March.
- c. However, Ms. Gannon emphasized that her staff is presently doing all they can to work with struggling students; they did away with mid-terms & finals; lowest grade can get is 50%; this has been beneficial for some kids because they can come back from 50% to earn credit
- d. Ms. Gannon said to invite Mr. Cocchiola from the School Counseling Department to attend an SGC meeting to discuss what has been happening regarding college prep; she has been

looking into possible scholarships and writing some recommendations for students for these scholarships.

**10. New Business**

- a. None discussed

**11. Adjournment – Frank Dixon**

**Next Meeting:** February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2021, 6pm on Zoom