

Hamden High School (HHS) School Governance Council

Meeting Minutes

May 17th, 2021, 6pm (on Zoom)

Members Present (alphabetical order): Evelyn Cumberbatch, Chris Daur, Frank Dixon, Nadine Gannon, Imani Gatison, Judy Goldberg, John Hannah, Andrew Hull, Frank LaDore, Elizabeth Marini, Jack Purdue, Nancy Restivo, Melinda Saller, Ann Stiltner, Greg Thierault

Members Not Present: Darce DeCosta, John Donahue, Mark Zarrillo

Members Resigned since last meeting: Mark Gabriel

Guests Present: Daniel Cocchiola

1. Welcome - Frank Dixon

- a. Frank D. welcomed members and opened meeting

2. Approval of Minutes – Evelyn Cumberbatch

- a. Eve asked for any input on April's minutes; motion to approve/seconded, and approved; Eve will ask media specialist to post on HHS SGC website

3. Council and Administrative Remarks – Liz Marini

- a. Liz said have a packed agenda for tonight; she is impressed what the subcommittees have been able to accomplish in a short amount of time including creating lofty goals and doing smaller projects – thanked everyone for being here and for their commitment and hard work

4. Principals Update – Ms. Gannon reported that:

- a. Prom, May 7th; chilly but a success; feedback was given that students were happy
- b. Covid-19 Vaccine clinics; 1st vaccine clinic last week with 138 students vaccinated; next clinic this Saturday for the entire town of Hamden; HMS running clinic next week;
- c. Graduation: will be held outside of football field; capacity is 50%; will provide students with tickets
- d. Junior and Senior Awards; not been approved for inside yet; will probably have to hold it outside
- e. Equity in Grading; will be meeting with a group of staff & teachers who volunteered who will serve on this committee; 1st meeting tomorrow; will be reviewing current and possible future grading practices in order to be more equitable; will review how are grades developed across different content areas

- i. A few members said thanks for vaccine clinics
- ii. Eve asked what process will be after this group of staff/teachers meets to review grading and equity?
- iii. Ms. Gannon said only just starting to review this issue
- iv. John H. said that in past reviews, for instance during the Commission of Civil Rights review in 200, community members were part of review; he noted that the public should be invited to participate in the conversation

5. Board of Education Report: Melinda Saller

- a. Melinda said the budget for Town of Hamden was presented to the legislative council; they have not approved the entire budget, but they increased what the mayor had approved for Board of ED, now the mayor is reviewing this; the Board of Ed budget is bare-bones covering contractual agreements and keeping levels of services at present levels
 - i. Frank D. asked if have additional funding
 - ii. Melinda said that may have other funding (some grant and state funds), but not guaranteed, and if not come in, things will be difficult for the school district
 - iii. Frank D. asked if the extra funds will only subsidize current resources or will allow further services
 - iv. Melinda said it would be for additional items beyond the budget, for example, the money put towards the Chrome books (to pay for fire-walls, repair, insurance...)
 - v. Ann asked if money coming from state will go directly to Board of Ed or to the Town
 - vi. Melinda said it would go to the Town, but it will be earmarked for the Board of Ed and for certain purposes

6. Extra: Hamden HHS Guidance Counseling Overview: Daniel Cocchiola

- a. Liz introduced Daniel Cocchiola, head of the Guidance Department
- b. Liz also asked Greg if he would like to present any questions
- c. Greg T. said he had a few questions forwarded to him and a few that came up at a sub-committee (SC) meeting; a couple kind of related; will paraphrase them. The first came up at a recent sub-committee meeting, from a member of SGC; it has 2 parts. First, if there is any chance for post-secondary planning conversation to

happen with families earlier than they do now? When you come in and start getting into high gear at the end of Junior year, it's really overwhelming; any chance for it to start bare bones in 9th-10th grade years? And the second; could there be more of an opportunity to provide a wider range of opportunities for kids, not just about college, but more opportunities to talk about directions outside of college?

d. Mr. Cocchiola said these are wonderful questions. Will take #2 first: he thinks they do a pretty thorough job of non-college bound support; it is less visible and more 1:1; he thinks in the community and in the school, there is a focus on 4-year college; students and families buy into this; this coaching and advising doesn't happen in same group-settings; if thinks about data tracking, the outcome measures – 4-year college or trade schools or work in manufacturing and engineering academy to provide real-world job opportunities to students - they do give some attention to this, but it doesn't get a ton of attention. Regarding question #1, the other question, he loves this feedback; their job is to respond to stakeholders needs; if there is a need in the community coming from this group to adjust post-secondary planning curriculum down to grade 10 or grade 9, there are other districts that do this, and he is open to working through this and providing this opportunity; last time did full program review was 5.5 years ago; standards say should do review every 10 years; that is valuable feedback; and absolutely can do this.

e. Greg T. said had a couple other questions came his way; thanked Mr. Cocchiolla again for joining us

f. Mr. Cocchiola said he wishes he could have been with us a couple months ago

g. Greg T. said he had a question; has seen this be very successful in school where he works - the idea of a more formal mentoring program with upperclassmen working with freshmen and sophomores; seems like school counselling could be involved.

h. Mr. Cocchiolla said he will share this answer with Nadine, as Scott Trauner is working with HHS Ambassadors program and, when Nadine envisioned this, the objective is similar to what he hears Greg saying; but this year didn't have capacity to run the Ambassadors program as envisioned; but upper-classmen to lower-classmen happens in the Ambassadors program; he asked Nadine if he was missing anything?

i. Nadine G. asked Greg to share how doing this in his school and for any operational pieces that he can share?

j. Greg T. said yes; it is not 1:1 mentoring program; it is called Linked Crew; their school signed-on, but not sure how closely following the Linked program; they are not necessarily buying into the whole program, but they did some training; has advisory part that is similar to Connections; they have student leaders who are assigned to an advisory group; he has an advisory group that he leads, some weeks it is just him; it has planned activities; sometimes stray if they want to talk and he will open the session, but sometimes the Link Leaders join and run the program; they do team building exercises, but sometimes it is more school related, like getting feedback on things; they try to do ice-breaker on 2nd week of school; doesn't go over as well as when two cool Junior/Seniors run the program; over the course of the year, Link Leaders are there to make relationships and establish communication and the students grow to trust them and grow more related to them; pretty effective helping kids make connections with other people in the school and making use of that time; not teacher directed, led by students; there is some training involved; not sure is necessary to go all into Linked Crew, have to pay, but may not be necessary.

k. Mr. Cocchiola said he has done a training in Linked Crew and he used it in a previous district and his home-town uses it as well; thinks it is quality; the cost associated is a challenge; this ties back to equity work – last year in Connections think did a great job of bringing in student leaders to have equity based discussions; using Connections that way is smart, agrees.

l. Greg T. said that is the take-away, not really necessary to buy the program, but that dedicated time to have students come in and be part of those sessions and establish connections; discussions can be more honest with students leading them. He also has two other questions. Regarding class ranking and the idea that not every kid knows their rank; if it were more public, would it serve as a motivator; for kids to realize they need to pull it together?

m. Mr. Cocchiola said this is a can of worms; they don't rank students; they report deciles; and decile is relatively stable; some movement, but relatively stable. They are asking if ranking is at all equitable? This is something he has been asking himself lately; if students don't have access to the most highly weighted classes for a variety of reasons, they don't have access to the highest decile; they are wrestling with this. This is part of a larger conversation around grading practices that Nadine is initiating.

- n. Frank D. said what is a can of worms is who is making the decision not to rank; everyone needs to understand where the decision is coming from.
- o. Mr. Cocchiola said that this had been a board policy going back at least 10 years; and his understanding, it may be a bit of lore; at least for his time in the district is that it has been a board policy.
- p. John H. said it's not clear to him that they don't rank; he knows students who can tell how they are ranked and how others are ranked; actually, also the Levels are a form of ranking; and the Office of Civil Rights was talking about this back in 2000, when looked at distribution – minority students are overrepresented in the lower ranks; he has had kids sit in his office and tell him who they felt was #1 and they were not too far off; they know there is an underlying algorithm and they figure it out. One of the things with being honest and open, sunlight, it allows folks to know what is going on; there are students who are getting all As, but their classes are weighted in such a way that they are at the bottom of the class; so the only way that the parent knows what is going on is that they have some other proxy to let them know what is going on. Sunlight is the best disinfectant to know what is going on and what adjustments need to make; not have too many students in HHS who say we don't rank. That is how you get #1 student in class and determine who is going to give that speech up on the stage.
- q. Mr. Cocchiola said that is one of the things we have been talking about this year at length and is driving the discussion of more equitable practices going forward; one thing that Greg knows to is that UConn gives a full-ride scholarship to the #1 and #2 ranked students in each public school in CT – how do we not identify those students; that is part of an example of how we might have been stuck in having feet on both sides of the fence and that doesn't work, he thinks; that is part of the discussion and part of the discussion that Nadine is leading.
- r. John H said, but there is an algorithm, that's how you figure out how to do that and the public has a right to know what that algorithm formally is.
- s. Mr. Cocchiola said the green and gold guide identifies the weighting of each level vis-a-vis the grader; an A+ in a 9 level class is worth certain points verses a 7 or 5 level class; that is how you compare students; they don't publish ranks, but kids get a calculator and talk to each other and they get a pretty good picture of what it looks like; but he gets it.

t. John H. said part of the conversation is how to be open to the public; informed citizenry is part of democratic process; if know what is going on, then know what the opportunities are; give an example of how discriminate against special education students; there are some that could be at the top of the class, others in middle or lower; for instance, the resource classes can only be taken at a level 5, so there are 4 less opportunities over 4 years to be competitive; there are students who would have been in the National Honor Society or in the top 10% of the class if not for this practice; in real-time they are affected.

u. Mr. Cocchiola said yes, he agrees with this; he sees these stories too; he said John has this institutional knowledge; there are also other groups of families or constituents who will advocate vociferously for a system that has more definition of rank; our system is that it has tried to have a foot in both places; but not work for either; so Nadine has taken this task on and important that tackle it.

v. John H. said not always; last time Mr. Cocchiola came and changed the grading system, never had this discussion; that is part of what led us to this place; he was warning if went ahead and did what went ahead and did, the impact would be pretty severe; can't say that have foot in both places when not listening to one side of conversation; when ask question about opportunities for all students; when took out wood shop and auto shop and brought HECA in, and fine for bringing HECA in, but the capacity is 150-200 students over 4 years, but took out program that was open to entire student body; for a highly sophisticated program in which you are expecting some percent of each class to be in; he avoided concretely saying what opportunities offering to those students.

w. Mr. Cocchiola said he didn't realize he wasn't avoiding being more concrete; he apologized for this.

x. Frank D. said he thinks some of the underlying conversation is that the perception is that some of the strategies and decision making is being done in a vacuum and the transparency isn't there which is causing some of the actual equity or the perceptions of the inequity challenges that we are looking at; just listening to some of the things that Coach Hana his saying and some of the teacher resources and being in the school for a while, you and I have had back door conversations about a few things...he gets that piece; not to say Coach Hana is finished, but wants to let Ms. Gannon step in because her name has been brought up a few times.

y. Nadine G. said the equity work that we are doing as a district has really brought a lot of things to the table; will advance to talk about leveling in our school, but first has to address how students are being graded; Coach and she talk about it often, and will continue to address this; that is the first step in the bigger conversation, she and Coach talk about it often and she will continue to address this. Cocchiola and she have discussed current leveling system and they have concerns with it; needs to be transparent across the board; conversations with staff tomorrow is how does each student earn a quarter and a final grade; how are they grading them; what is the percent in content area; on a 0-100 scale and 60% is a failing grade, looking at late work and redoing and retaking certain work – those are some equitable practices that need to look at and institute and then move to the leveling conversation; her name has been brought up because it is the work that has to be done, it's not whether or not is had to be done, it has to be done; she will be very transparent and vocal to the community; it has to be a public conversation, and the Board of Education needs to be involved; the HMS has made changes in how they operate; that is excited for the work; not on an island, not making these decisions on her own; with the work that they are doing with Dr. LaSalle and Kellan Nixon; every month doing work on equity and talking about equitable practices and what equitable practices they are not doing; need to start with grading and move on to leveling

z. Mr. Cocchiola: said, Frank, if don't mind, he had a couple of things that wants to close out this last line of questioning with. First thing, will address CTE, HECA, as well as other programs in this Dept.; this year they are offering 3 sections of wood and next year will offer 5; they have been understaffed in that department, but will be at full capacity again for next year and will be able to offer 10 electives in CTE, which have not had opportunity to do in a number of years; so, those courses that John H. rightly said allow access to all students; it wasn't by design that they don't exist; it was a variety of issues, predominantly staffing, which we have corrected already; that is important component – access for all kids to have access to career readiness for all kids; this decision to close the auto shop was not his decision, but it was one that made a lot of sense to move forward for the district and the students; the other piece and needs to go back to 2016 when the grade weighting for AP classes was amended so that AP classes were weighted more than level 9s. At the time, that was identified as a problem by a variety of stakeholders, and it was brought to

committees, both community-based and school-based, administration and Board of Education, before moving it to approval. Does he see the inherent flaw in that, and one that John saw more clearly before? The answer is yes, that is why he is one of the greatest agitators right now in the school and district to help us move in a more equitable direction; at the time, it was a decision that resolved some issues that were identified and it has to be corrected.

aa. John H. said it is not really clear, to be fair Dan. He never liked the idea of him (Mr. Cocchiola) working in isolation. The other piece that is important, he would like to know who the stakeholders are? Because these stakeholders clearly didn't include, as far as he knows, anyone in the African American community; and that's troubling. When we decided in 2000 not to do exactly what was done 5 years ago, at the table was the Chair of the Department of nursing at Yale University, and a number of college professors were there, and members of the community. When look at data, only 23% who take AP exams pass the AP exams. So, our thinking is that what you will be doing is artificially inflating those students at the top; those points had to come from somewhere. Look at Level 5, which is supposed to be a college level, that's what we tell students; if you get anything below an A at a level 5, then the highest grade you can get is a D+; now that is overly punitive; it is beyond punitive. That wouldn't have happened if we had had this conversation.

bb. Mr. Cocchiola said he wants to move on from this, but needs to address one question: the stakeholders of color included Clydette Messiah and Gary Highsmith.

cc. John H. said he wants to be honest. Gary when he was here, they had these battles around this; he didn't change it because what he realized what he was saying was true. Clydette, at an AP meeting, challenged data that was AP data; Lisa challenged data that was their data that had been presented to the Board of Education. Gary nor Clydette ever had a child here; he had a child here; he understands intimately this process and this protocol.

dd. Frank D. said so where do we go from here? He understands challenges in the past, but where do we go from here moving forward? There were obviously some holes and challenges from the perception that it wasn't inclusive. So where to go and how to move forward with the process? Coach and Dan, we don't have to decide details today, but if we can get some sort of follow-up and coordination, just let us know the transparency going forward, and some of the initiatives that

will be put into place with timelines and benchmarks; and with coordination with what Ms. Gannon has going on; that is where we need to go. Loves listening to history and the past and definitely can't move forward without knowing where you have come from; but, got to put something in place to move forward to make sure don't have this conversation a year from now.

ee. Nadine G. said that she would say she is thankful and honored that Coach is part of her committees; she talks to Coach all the time and she is thankful and honored that he is part of this work; he has been here a long time. Where to go from here? First meeting will be having tomorrow to look at grading practices, looking at how kids are graded and are we doing it equitably and trying to be transparent; and we will begin work of looking at the leveling system. She will be working during the summer and seeing where can go. The key is when changing practice like this, the way you roll it out is with the incoming class; that has been her practice over the years and can't see doing it any other way. She is happy that has Mr. Hana on her committees and she is picking his brain all the time. She is also honored and privileged to have Dr. LaSalle and Kellan Nixon help us do the work on equity and inclusivity; they have been a huge asset to the district regarding equity and inclusivity. She will share next steps, looking at practices in different communities and at schools like ours and how they are grading; maybe none of them are grading as we feel we should be grading. She has been reading a lot on equitable grading. That is where we are starting tomorrow.

ff. Frank D. asked when the committee comes up with a proposal, does that process of approval stay in committee or does it have to go to coordination with Mr. Cocchiola or does it have to go to the Board of Education? What does that process look like?

gg. Nadine G. said what we will do is, this committee of teachers and staff who have volunteered, will be sharing findings with directors and superintendent, and will present it to the curriculum committee or one of committees on Board of Education to talk about grading practices. Will also share what findings are with SGC. It's not going to be a surprise as to how and what will be doing regarding equitable grading.

hh. Frank D. said he is confident, has been around you guys in school system for a while, with legacy knowledge of Coach Hana and the passion of Principle Gannon, and the tenacity of Mr. Cocchiolla, and now that have Melinda representing the Board, he is confident that will

put something through that can all be satisfied with. Asked Mr. Cocchiola if has anything else? And Greg?

ii. Greg T. said, no, those are all the questions he has.

jj. Frank D. thanked Dan for coming and sharing where we are; said don't be a stranger.

kk. Mr. Cocchiola said, no, this is a pleasure, like everyone one of you so much, all of you sorry, Zoom doesn't have everyone. Thanks.

ll. Nancy said she has a question; on PowerSchool, used to see GPA; daughter has been applying to college; they would ask about GPA; not there anymore; curious as to why; besides contacting the guidance counselor.

mm. Mr. Cocchiola said the GPA on PowerSchool was in-year GPA, which was erroneous, didn't include all course history, so had to disable it. But, GPA is on transcript; so for students applying to colleges, we share transcript with every 12th grader at beginning of school year, as well as sharing with students during junior student college planning session; how to read transcript and understand GPA, the counselor will help students through this. Can we have PowerSchool have it up? The answer is that we are now 4 years into PowerSchool and institutional capacity is building; 4-5 people in-district who are experts. There is a list of priorities, of which having GPA present on the quick look-up screen is one he and Nadine are advocating for. This summer have few tasks for PowerSchool crew to work through. A couple of them you may notice right away. Hopefully PS will be more user friendly.

nn. Nancy said thanks; only mattered this year as daughter is applying to college and curious where went.

oo. Greg T said we (his school) are 12 years into PowerSchool and still use only use it for fraction of what it can be used for.

pp. Melinda S. said (jokingly) she uses it to torture her daughter (laughter).

qq. Eve made a comment that going forward we need to find a balance of equity and continuing to incentivize students to reach their best potential.

rr. Melinda Saller thanked Mr. Cocchiola for supporting her child to reach best she can do.

7. Student/Teacher Committee- Imani Gatison and Jack Purdue

a. Jack & Imani didn't present at this meeting

8. Sub-Committee Goals and Members – Liz Marini introduced discussion

a. EDUCATION/SCHOOL COUNSELING – Liz Marina

i. Liz asked Greg to share; Greg said that this committee met and came up with the questions for Mr. Cocchiola above; also solidified 2 goals:

1. Reviewing class leveling: they are not sure what their role can be, but they want to move this along
2. Vertical alignment: of requirements and expectations moving from HMS to HHS

ii. Liz said she can do more to think about next steps for this committee

b. SAFETY/OPERATIONS/COMMUNICATION – Mark Zarillo

i. Liz read a communication that she was given that this committee is working on:

“We agreed that honing in on two areas in particular: 1) improving the current HVAC system and 2) implementing a post-pandemic, in-school task force, seemed like the most attainable and applicable. Improving the ratio of outside/inside air creates its own challenges in extreme weather conditions and will require substantial investment, however we believe it's time for such measures. Creating a more robust support staff to deal with not only COVID-related issues for staff and students but as a long-term health/operations team brings the school into a new world paradigm. We feel that setting milestones based on a timeline e.g., 1yr, 3yr, & 5yr goals, will allow for the proper design, methodology and of course, funding.”

ii. Chris D. then added that the District did get grants (state Alliance money, local utilities) and will be replacing all HVAC units this summer; this is going well and the schools should see improvements very soon

c. MENTAL HEALTH/SUPPORTS – Ann Stiltner

i. Liz said this committee has been doing a phenomenal job over the past few months

ii. Teacher/Staff Appreciation Event – Ann said this went very well; she thanked the many businesses and individuals who donated gift cards and money and sent these along with a lovely letter that Eve composed; she received 20-30 personal email thank-yous; well received; this committee is thinking do it more often and make regular event; it is good for the teachers/staff to know it came from the SGC –

and the SGC is saying, “you are doing good things and we hear and support you.”

iii. List of Mental Health Programs/Resources for Students & Families as well as Teachers/Staff:

1. This is completed and is available for the SGC to review

iv. Letter to Superintendent and Board of ED:

1. Ann said this was shared with various stake holders: T. Ott, Ms. Gannon, her boss, SPED teachers, psychologists

2. Ann asking what are next steps - for letter to go to the Superintendent and the Board of Education?

3. Liz said give people a deadline to object or give comments.

4. Chris D. and Melinda S. said don't wait too long; as has budgetary impacts because budget discussions are happening now

5. Ann asked if should send by end of week?

6. Liz said that the SGC should send any last comments to Ann directly by Friday, and then it can be sent to the Superintendent and the Board of Education

d. **BUDGET**

i. Melinda said she will hopefully will send some updated information soon

e. **SCHOOL PROMOTION/SCHOOL CLIMATE - Liz Marini**

i. Liz noted that Mark Gabriel resigned from the SGC

ii. Liz said that Jack and Imani haven't gotten together due to their plethora of obligations; the SGC needs to begin to look into who can fill their shoes

9. Old Business – Frank Dixon

a. **Regarding finding new student members:**

i. John H. said he met last week with the facilitators for minority clubs and he was provided with some student names, maybe 10, and he will follow up with students individually

ii. Liz said hopefully can get some variation in grade levels, though seniors often have valuable information to impart before leaving

10. New Business

a. Nancy said that it seems like the process to nominate new members and bring on board is time consuming; she asked if there is any way for this process to start now and continue over the summer, so we can hit ground running in Sept/Oct?

- b. Liz said she agrees, and the SGC can begin to figure out which members are staying/leaving and can begin to start recruiting
- c. Eve said that currently for next year the SGC will have 1 teacher opening and 2 student openings

11. Adjournment – Frank Dixon

- a. Liz said some closing remarks; then motion to adjourn was offered, seconded, and approved

Next SGC meeting: June 14, 2021, 6pm, plan for Zoom meeting