

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

(Official Report)

Roundtable Meeting

May 16, 2017

Called for immediately following the Regular Meeting of the School Committee on May 16, 2017 in the Henrietta S. Attles Meeting Room, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, 459 Broadway, Cambridge, for the purpose of discussing the High School Extension Program (HSEP).

Members Present: Ms. Bowman, Ms. Dexter, Mr. Fantini, Mr. Harding,
Ms. Kelly, Ms. Nolan (ABSENT), and Mayor Simmons (ABSENT)

Also present: Dr. Kenneth Salim, Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Carolyn Turk, Deputy Superintendent
Dr. Anda Adams, Asst. Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction
Dr. Victoria Greer, Asst. Superintendent of Student Services
Ms. Maryann MacDonald, Asst. Superintendent for Elementary Education
Ms. Claire Spinner, Chief Financial Officer
Ms. Mawakana Onifade, Principal, HSEP
Mr. Tony Clark, Educational Liaison to Mayor
Mr. Dan Monahan, CEA President

Mr. Fantini in the Chair.

A quorum of the School Committee being present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 7:12 PM. Mr. Fantini turned the meeting over to Superintendent Salim to make introductory remarks.

Dr. Turk introduced representatives from the High School Extension Program. She gave a brief overview of the High School Extension Program including the current profile (draft) Spring 2017 and began the PowerPoint presentation (on file in the School Committee office).

Introductions and Agenda Overview

About HSEP – Who are we?

51 students currently enrolled, 14 staff

Where are we now?

Program Highlights

A Look at the Data (College & Career, Academic Achievement Data, Attendance)

Curriculum Highlights

Voices of the HSEP Community:

Educators, Students & Caregivers

Daniel Goldman, ELA Teacher, Peter Haycox, Science Teacher/HSEP Graduate

Students: Tassy Francois, Jason Ingram, Gavin Wright, Atahja Lucona

Samantha Fontanez, Alumni of HSEP

Parents: Roxann Hyman, Tamyka Jacobs

Conversation

Guiding Question: What can we learn from the voices of the HSEP Community that will help us meet the 21st century needs of the Students and families we serve in an alternative education learning setting?

Wrap-up and Next Steps

Ms. Bowman exited the meeting (7:30 pm).

Dr. Turk introduced representatives from the High School Extension Program including the Principal, teachers, current students, parents and alumni. She invited them to share their thoughts and experiences with the Committee.

Dan Goldman shared that he teaches English Language Arts and Senior Seminar which focuses on building college essays, developing interview skills, creating a cover letter and resume and doing a research action change project with such topics as social justice and racism, etc. Students research articles, collect data and build a survey for the community which they develop into a short research paper and then present to the class.

Peter Haycox shared that he is an alumni of the HSEP class of 2007 and currently a teacher at HSEP. He started at CRLS and indicated that he felt very alienated, acted up and got kicked out of CRLS. At the HSEP, he noted that he found a tight knit community and made connections with teachers and students, got all A's and graduated a year early. He worked odd jobs for a while. He started as a paraprofessional and a substitute. He worked his way through college and got his master's in teaching. He wanted to give back to HSEP which he stated was a place that saved his life.

Josh Cox shared that he is an alumni of HSEP. He added that he was in the class of 2014 but he wasn't fitting in at the main campus of CRLS. He basically dropped out at age 15. He came back at age 17 to the HSEP. He graduated in 2016 doing dual enrollment with Benjamin Franklin and had a great year. He took a gap year and is looking forward to almost a full ride to New England College. He stated that HSEP changed his life.

Debra Hurley-Jones shared that she is the mother of Isabella who is an alumni of HSEP. She read a statement from her daughter Isabella. Isabella stated in her letter that she was a child suffering with depression and her school system couldn't help her but attending HSEP gave her the support she needed. HSEP made her feel that every effort she made to be a better student was worth it and she graduated 6 months early. Ms. Hurley Jones added that her daughter felt loved and embraced by the teachers at HSEP.

Ann Haycox shared that she is the mother of Peter Haycox and from a parent's side, she knows the feeling when you see your child who is full of potential hit a rough patch. Even though CRLS has rich resources, those rich resources didn't fit her son. Her son needed a lifeline back to education. CRLS was too big for him. He needed a place where he was known. The HSEP staff responded to what he needed at that moment.

Atahja Lucona shared that she is a current senior at HSEP. She noted that her teachers have been like mentors to her. They believe in her and don't let her give up even during bad days. They help students and she shared that she wouldn't be who she is today without them. She will be going to Bunker Hill Community college for biology next year. She wants to be a surgeon.

Roxann Hymon, who is Atahja's mother, talked about Atahja's attendance and circumstances including mental health issues that affected her last year. Ms. Hymon shared that Ms. Onifade was a lifeline for Atahja. Atahja was able to "buy" into the program. Atahja was there, she learned, caught up and went ahead and will be graduating in June. They are so thankful to the staff at the HSEP.

Francesa Ince shared that she is an alumni of HSEP. She noted that HSEP helped and changed her and that the big setting at CRLS was not for her. HSEP helped her get on the right track and focus on her grades. Teachers cared for her at HSEP.

Ms. Onifade read a letter from Jason Ingram who is a current senior at HSEP. In his letter, Jason shared that he is having a great experience at HSEP. He noted that they welcomed him with open arms; helped him learn how to grow as a person; how to trust people; how to focus and find better ways to learn. He learned about the law and was shown that he has more potential than he thought. He added that they have faith in him as a student. When he lost his mother in late June, they encouraged him and helped him to continue through. He indicated that they give him so much support and that he loves it at HSEP.

A discussion followed around the following issues, questions and concerns:

Ms. Kelly added that there is a lot we can learn from students and families and that should drive our schools. For a number of students having a small school, small class size and developing relationships with teachers is what really matters. She sees the strength in the HSEP model. She indicated that this can help us think how to create communities in the larger high school as well. You can take this practice back to other environments. She added that she wants all students to be able to graduate with a strong educational experience and understand who they are in that community and take that with them to the next level.

Ms. Dexter thanked the students and parents for speaking and for the presentation. She asked the following questions: how many students come for one year or two years? what is the course of the relationship with CRLS? do we have a system set up for getting assigned to HSEP? what is the process for students to go there? how many students come to main campus to take classes? what are the attendance rates by grade? have you thought of a different model for students who have poor attendance? Dr. Turk noted that a student is not assigned or required to go to the HSEP. There is an interview process.

Mr. Harding added that we have many resources in Cambridge and there is no need for even one student to not have their needs met. He explained the reasons why he sponsored the motion to hold this roundtable meeting to discuss the school climate, student achievement and curriculum of the HSEP. Its purpose was not for any negative reason but to simply obtain information. There was a feeling that the Committee didn't know enough about what was happening at HSEP. He asked clarifying questions which were confirmed by Dr. Turk that the school is 78% people of color and 75% free and reduced lunch. He commented that all students learn differently and it is how they are prepared for their future path. He would like to know what HSEP graduates are doing after they graduate. Mr. Harding asked for more information on how it works when students show up at noontime for class; on clinical support for students with depression or anxiety; on how to enter HSEP; on how are we assessing the student's progress; and can a student apply to HSEP following 8th grade. Mr. Harding noted that the HSEP is very different than it was 10 years ago.

Dr. Turk responded that the school was designed not to have a large number of students. The maximum would be 100 but they have never gone over 70 students. She pointed out that there are real teachers instructing these students. When the school first started, there were more online courses. It has evolved over time. Dr. Turk noted that there are many reasons why students explore the HSEP. There is a range of reasons why and it looks very different than it did previously.

Mr. Fantini shared his strong belief 10 years ago to begin the HSEP since our dropout rate at that time was significantly higher than other communities. We had to respond to this need. These students are smart, committed and engaged and needed a place where they could shine. We are now one of the best urban systems in terms of dropout rates. We need to be strategic during this transition to find ways to take into consideration the best practices out there. He spoke about visiting alternative schools in other cities. He added that the key element is interest, e.g. internship relationships. We should develop a plan for other opportunities. He suggested that the HSEP staff visit other alternative high school programs.

Ms. Onifade commented that she hopes the upper school principals with the new HSEP leadership in place would welcome conversation regarding the HSEP receiving their rising 9th graders. She added that they now have curriculum in place to receive 9th graders. She suggested that entering HSEP may be a great way for some student to start out in high school. Young students would need to see this school in a different favorable light. How can we change our image to other students. Josh Cox mentioned that students at HSEP are not violent and are just trying to get an education. He expressed his feelings that some CRLS students label them in that way. They have been told if you go to HSEP you are a failure. These students don't realize that you had something going on in your life and HSEP was there to help you. No one in your peer group at CRLS knew this.

Roxon Hyman added that her daughter got weekly check-ins and Ms. Onifade had an open door policy. Her daughter found resources with school staff and was able to take 5 minute breaks and then go back to classes. She had access to breaks if she needed them in the school environment.

Rachael Parish, special educator at HSEP, acknowledged that the HSEP is an expensive model but it plays a critical role in the district. She commented that we need to look at best practice and research for our students. We need to define what Cambridge wants for alternative education. She agreed that you can't compare CRLS with HSEP. Based on the research that exists, we can create a program that serves these students. She noted that the special education services to students at HSEP have been cut in half this year. She has to split her time between CRLS and HSEP. She noted that many students at HSEP have undiagnosed learning disabilities or chronic absences. Teachers and students need additional support and resources on a regular basis. She noted that having regular access to a special educator is critical at the HSEP.

Crystal Jones, building substitute, commented that the key component of good alternative schools are resources. There needs to be other people in the school to provide resources in addition to teachers and the principal. She indicated that academics can't be reached unless we deal with social and emotional issues. Cambridge should ask is this an alternative program or a therapeutic setting.

Professor Lloyd Johnson, professor at Bunker Hill Community College for 27 years, shared that at Bunker Hill Community College they have the same type of student population as HSEP. They have students who struggle because of personal issues and concerns. Some students take 3 or 4 years to finish community college. Many students at BHCC have depression, anxiety disorders, addiction problems, and suicidal thoughts. He noted that we can't isolate these students and put them in a box. We have to give them the support they need to be truly successful.

On behalf of the entire Committee, Mr. Fantini thanked Dr. Salim, Dr. Turk and the staff, students and parents of the High School Extension program for this informative presentation and meeting.

On a motion by Mr. Harding, seconded by Ms. Dexter, the meeting was adjourned at 9:00 PM.

Judith T. Martin
Executive Secretary
to the School Committee

Distributed Back-up Documents (copy on file in the School Committee office):

- PowerPoint presentation slides
- HSEP current profile (draft) Spring 2017