

Hamden High School (HHS) School Governance Council

Meeting Minutes

June 14th, 2021, 6pm (on Zoom)

Members Present (alphabetical order): Evelyn Cumberbatch, Chris Daur, Darce Decosta (left early in meeting), Frank Dixon (left at beginning of meeting), Imani Gatison, John Donahue, John Hannah, Elizabeth Marini, Nancy Restivo, Ann Stiltner

Members Not Present: Nadine Gannon, Frank LaDore, Jack Purdue, Andrew Hull, Mark Zarrillo, Melinda Saller, Greg Thierault

Members Resigned since last meeting: Judy Goldberg

Guests Present: none

1. Welcome – Frank Dixon and Liz Marini

- a. Liz said hello to various members directly and various members responded in kind; Liz made a comment about the 12th grade trip; she said it was kind of Dr. James and Ms. Gafni to allow reimbursement to students for the bus and still allow them to pick up their tickets; she appreciated this gesture
- b. Liz said just got message from Andrew Hull that he has emergency and will not make it tonight; he sends apologies and will read the minutes from the meeting
- c. Eve said Jack Purdue emailed and has an end of the year obligation and won't make it
- d. Liz made comment about this being time of year when everyone is stressed to get things done but it is also magic moment of year when people get reflective about the past year but also optimistic for what is coming next year and they think where have we come, what have we done, and what can we do differently; she is hearing these conversations in the hallways
- e. Frank D. said hello and apologized for being late and having to leave early; his 5:30pm meeting is going long; he wanted to get on call to tell everyone thank you for a great and interesting year; he remarked on the perseverance of young people, teachers, educators, and administrators and what had to come through this year; he congratulated Imani and Jack again for moving on to next education chapter (college); he said that Mark Zarillo told him that he won't make it tonight; he said hello to Ms. Decosta who is joining instead of Ms. Gannon
- f. Ms. Decosta said she will only be here 10 more minutes because her son is a senior and he is attending a senior scholarship ceremony tonight; she received congratulations from various members
- g. Frank D. thanked the SGC for a good year again and apologized; he said Liz and Eve would help run tonight's meeting; he said goodbye and he made Liz the host of the meeting

- h. Liz asked for access to the cloud recordings; Eve also asked for them; so had discussion of Frank sending audio recordings of the prior meetings; he will email them to Liz and Eve
- i. Liz requested for the order of the meeting to be switched around so that Ms. Decosta can speak first before she has to leave; approved by the SGC

(Note: some of the following discussion happened out of order from the Agenda items; if this happened, the discussion was moved to the order of the Agenda for organization and documentation purposes)

2. Approval of Minutes – Evelyn Cumberbatch (happened near end of meeting, but documented here)

- a. Eve said that John had emailed her about some changes he recommended to May's minutes, but she needs to listen to audio recording from last month to sort these out
- b. Liz said that she has some spelling changes to make and will email these
- c. Nancy said that if changes are to be made, can't approve them now, have to approve them after changes are made, so it was decided to wait and approve them after all changes are made

3. Governance Council and Administrative Remarks – Liz Marini

- a. Liz expressed appreciation that all the SGC members were present and engaged this past year; recognized it is a gift of time and energy
- b. Liz would like to take time later to discuss how to meet next year (Zoom or in-person) as well as to reflect on what worked
- c. Liz thanked Nancy for her questions about how to work on membership and fill the slots quickly so the SGC can hit the ground running next year, so wants to discuss membership and recruitment issues now

d. Governance Council Membership

- i. Liz said that she reached out to a few teachers; but one is starting other endeavors and can't make the commitment; another teacher is overwhelmed and burned-out, but Liz is hopeful that after a few weeks she may be interested; also recommended that Ms. Gannon put recruitment efforts in Dragon Update to help recruit now and over the summer; she wants to be clear on how many open slots and what efforts SGC can make over summer regarding recruitment
- ii. Nancy asked if a parent and her child can be on the council together
- iii. Liz said doesn't know of any language in the By Laws that limits this, but it may limit having different voices on the SGC; no prohibition but would like to draw a wider membership
- iv. Liz said needs at least 1 teacher, 2 students

- v. Eve said Judy Goldberg won't be returning, and Greg Thierault is thinking about it as he is very busy as principle of a school and his mother just died; so there are 2 open student spots, 1 open teacher spot, and 1 open parent spot
- vi. Nancy said she has a parent that is interested; and it was potentially her daughter as well who is interested
- vii. Nancy asked Imani if she has any ideas about students
- viii. Imani said she can ask around and she has a girl in mind and will email Ms. Marini about it
- ix. Eve offered a number of recommendations:
 - Don't cancel meetings early in year even if certain members can't attend; last year October was cancelled which slowed things down
 - Someone from the SGC executive council can go to the orientation sessions in late August to present about SGC to families
- x. Liz said she can take this on
 - Advertise in Ms. Gannon's Dragon Update as early as possible – put advertisements to parents starting in earliest Dragon Updates in year
- xi. Liz said Ms. Gannon may be sending the Dragon Update out in July and August
 - Eve asked if the papers for the bios of the parents are available on the Dragon Update and the Website, so they are easily accessible if parents want to apply
- xii. Liz said it may need to be turned into an editable PDF; can work with the media specialists to do this
- xiii. Ann said that Erica Tamsin had those forms and wondered where they are now and they may already be ready to use
- xiv. Liz will investigate and reach out to Erica
- xv. Ann also said that she can look into this
- xvi. John H. said need to actively try to recruit a minority teacher; he said the SGC has never had one, and reminded the SGC that this is not what the committee is supposed to be all about
- xvii. Liz seconded that diverse representation is important; she is ready to set down as Co-Chair to make room for anyone interested in being on the executive committee
- xviii. Ann said she will talk to Mr. Battle about minority students
- xix. Liz will also check in with Mr. Battle
- xx. John H. said he will bring students in through the EMAC advisory committee to give voice to those who have not had voices over the years
- xxi. Eve reminded Liz that she said at one point that it may not have to be a teacher and may be could be staff members
- xxii. John H. said that this is not clear; he could remember it saying it has to be a teacher; this is a problem because have very few

minority teachers; actually only have one who is a resident of Hamden, the guidance counselor Ms. King; wondered if any flexibility to think around this issue; no regular education African American teacher in the classroom; have not had one in 6-7 years; last one was Ms. Henderson; need to talk about this; even those people who are here don't always feel comfortable with the dynamics in this system and the integrity with how issues are handled

xxiii. Eve said she pulled up By-Laws; it says 5 Teachers are voting members; and it explains that Teachers are certified staff who perform majority of duties in a teaching capacity; para-professionals are not eligible to serve on the SGC; so does seem that needs to be teaching staff

xxiv. Ann said so guidance counselors couldn't do it

xxv. John. H. said that Ms. King is a certified teacher and has taught; aske, when so underrepresented, how to deal with this issue?; two of the AA teachers have kids of their own which makes it hard to do things; he isn't a certified teacher, but he has just come for last 5 years to help out because he thinks the SGC can do constructive things

xxvi. Ann asked if John H. will talk to Ms. King and see if she is interested

xxvii. John H. said he has talked to her but she hasn't had enjoyable experiences this year; that is problem; she is one of the brightest woman in the building and she has applied for positions and hasn't gotten them; you can't keep doing that to people without crushing their spirit; you just can't do it

xxviii. Eve asked John H. to explain Ms. King's position in the school

xxix. John said she is a guidance counselor; and she is a certified teacher and she is also certified in administration; she is a very bright, sharp, articulate woman; but unfortunately, but he will say this, about qualified African American and qualified white staff members, we don't always put best people in positions that they should have; that is just a problem, because there are some enormously talented staff, black and white, that won't be put in positions

xxx. Liza asked if any more input on recruitment for next year; no one responded

e. Review of Governance Council this past year, and looking forward for next year

- i. Liz said she wants to talk about ideas for next year and purpose and focus for going forward; this is her 4th year on SGC; has been difficult last year to be in education and to be human; hard to move needle forward because constantly had to change expectations; what gives her pause and concern is that it is unclear if there is unified vision on SGC about what looking to

do and what want to accomplish, wants equal opportunity of voice; previous SGC president, Sherlot; she had sent out a Microsoft document – but we could do this as a google form, where everyone has opportunity to talk about goal that they would like SGC to achieve next year; if can pull resources together in better way, might be a bit more functional in how approach and solve problems; present sub-committees are left over from previous SGC administrations; thinks folks might be on sub-committees who might not know what goals are; she would be in favor of sharing out goals on the google form and narrow goals into different sub-committees or around unified sets of goals

- ii. John H. said he thinks we need to process our process; sometimes have to stop and talk to each other about how things are going, communication, and shared goals; that is essential because that is how lose each other when those things aren't processed; we all come at things in different ways; idea behind processing is communicating why we might see things differently and try to find common ground to move issues; he thinks is something that would help the committee
- iii. Liz said agrees that having share purpose and focus would be ideal for us
- iv. John H. said that it is also how we hear each other
- v. Eve mirrored what she heard John say: that process is what is important; how our process together flows and works or doesn't work and the process within the meetings is important
- vi. John H. agreed and thinks it would be help
- vii. Ann said that the effectiveness of the organization is our goal; to discuss and listen that we share goals and outcomes for the SGC
- viii. Eve made comments on the effectiveness of the council; she has been here almost 3 years; she has one more year; after rereading the By-Laws; she thinks that this committee has more power than it necessarily understands; and it has more potential and power to drive things, push things, shake things up; so, we are not just hear to hear about what is going on which happens a lot; this was shown in working with the mental health sub-committee, which thanks to John, Ann, and Nancy was a great experience; different people had really great ideas and we did some nice things; but one important thing was the letter to the Board which was driven by John H. and Ann's experience and it has a couple of important asks; brought up good discussions regarding HHS; and it isn't finished and isn't done; requires push and continuing to agitate; she thinks the leadership in the SGC could continue to take on sense that there is a mission here and we don't have a lot of time and we

need to push, that would help to galvanize energy and productivity in the SGC to move forward and push to move forward and do some things that are important

- ix. Liz thinks the mental health sub-committee shows what can be done with a group of passionate people what change can be effected
- x. Ann agreed and said we were a group that worked together and listened and had a common vision and a common goal and that is what we all hope for the whole SGC
- xi. John H. said we weren't afraid to challenge each other; and that is essential to be constructive; if someone had a different opinion we discussed it; we are not supposed to be a "yes" committee
- xii. Liz agreed that can't be an echo chamber because they we don't grow
- xiii. Chris D. said he wanted to offer a couple things; he sees the SGC as advising the principle on how want to deal with issues that the SGC sees from the outside that she sees from the inside; with different perspectives can get best solution going forward; the committees that the SGC has are very broad based and can do a lot with those and can direct them in a lot of different directions; would offer that, with the mental health committee, it was very comprehensive in what looking for, and will try at the Board level to push the superintendent to work with the principle so that these suggestions can come to fruition; suggested to follow up with the principle and being consistent in the guidance you want her to direct for these programs; there are grant moneys available for the next two years through grants and federal monies; if there are programs you want to talk to the principle about and see if you can bring them better into to focus, thinks there are monies that you can leverage to make this happen, but need to be consistent in pressure through the summer months because can lose those couple months when try to pick it up again, it is a loss; so keep up constant reminder of these programs, are there monies, and how to access those monies; try to work with the principle on what you can and can't do within confines of system, but keep asking what funds are available as that is the driver of the system, but sometimes the squeaky wheel gets the oil, you have to nudge in consistent and productive way, but people will work with you; be consistent with her and nudge, but follow the money, but have opportunity over next year and a half with the federal grants
- xiv. Eve then jumped ahead to the mental health sub-committee (documented below).

4. Principals Update – Darce Decosta, Assistant Principal (occurred earlier in meeting as Ms. Decosta had to leave)

- a. Apologized for Ms. Gannon not being able to be here; she is at the retirement ceremony for a staff member who is retiring and she is at that ceremony
- b. **Junior/Senior Award Ceremony this Wednesday**; out on football field; 5pm Junior Awards, 5:45 Cord Ceremony, 6.30 is Senior Scholarships; by invite only, so students already invited
- c. **Graduation is Monday 6/21/21, 6pm**; with bright, sunny skies!
- d. **New Bell Schedule**; Ms. Gannon will be providing more information soon; it was approved by the Board, within the schedule time for students to have interventions – tutoring, credit recovery, one on one time with teaches, will give more information in future
 - i. Nancy asked whether graduation was limited by number of tickets/seating?
 - ii. Ms. Decosta said no tickets for outside, so there are unlimited guests; the rain-date will likely be next day, still figuring that out
 - iii. Liz said that if SGC has questions about new bell schedule, she is happy to be point person to gather questions and forward them to Ms. Gannon
 - iv. Ms. Decosta asked if any other questions; none were voiced, she thanked everyone for being on the SGC, and said goodbye

5. Board of Education Report:

- a. Melinda Saller not present (See discussion under Mental Health sub-committee which included some discussion of the budget)

6. Student/Teacher Committee- Imani Gatison (Jack Purdue not present)

- a. Imani said that she and Jack have been very busy and they have not had a chance to talk about the Student-Teacher Committee
- b. Ann asked if they have discussed whether some underclass students could take it over
- c. Imani said that she and Jack were able to start to run this group, but because they are both seniors and were applying to colleges, they will now consider passing it to underclass students
- d. Liz asked to have students forward their contact information so she can help them; she said that upcoming students will have to have a Capstone project and she wonders if this Student-Teacher Committee or a branch of the SGC could help build a larger network of mentors for the students

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

a. EDUCATION/SCHOOL COUNSELING – Liz Marina

- i. John H. said Education committee is not here; but he sent some committee members a video because it speaks to the problems

with a grading that is not accessible and open and when folks are discriminated against they can take legal action; in that school in Mississippi this is already happening; because told that some of the practices at HHS are discriminatory, need to address the practices as soon as possible because they have real consequence for students in real time

- ii. Eve said she read the article in the NYTimes; it was fascinating and interesting
- iii. John H. said few years ago happened at HHS; Rachel Jones was told she would graduate #1; on the day of, a decision was made that a white student would co-share that award, the fire department acknowledged him first and said he was valedictorian; the young lady had no knowledge of that and it turned into not so beautiful kind of thing; how treat African Americans really matters; doesn't bode well for us in Hamden; looking at Zakira's book talking about isolation in Hamden; another woman whose child went to Sacred Heart talking about placing son in kindergarten in school, but have created segregated communities; friend sent picture of Mom from 1963 being arrested for protesting racial segregation in elementary school he went to; was 20% minority; now 90% minority because people vote with their feet – need to look at what doing in Hamden is what he is saying.
- iv. Chris D. said that after listening to John H. and Dan Cocchiolla last month, he does have some good points and need to bring issues to curriculum committee at Board of Education; recalled grading issue from a few years ago; wondered if was same issue;
- v. John H. said he is not sure
- vi. Chris D. said it was issue that student was not at HHS in freshman year and had had a 5 level course; that had a play in it; the order it was announced and can understand that it could have been inflammatory; there was an issue with a 5 level class and the points he made about that were valid and need to look at that
- vii. John H. said he is willing to help and has been willing to help for ever
- viii. Chris D. said that he will try to push it with the curriculum committee and he will keep John H. posted, but he would appreciate his input on those

b. SAFETY/OPERATIONS/COMMUNICATION – Mark Zarillo

- i. Not present

c. MENTAL HEALTH/SUPPORTS – Ann Stiltner

- i. Eve asked Chris D. how to follow-up on the letter; heard back from superintendent that there is grant money available to fund PPT coordinator position; but grant money can come and go;

we want to ask what is best level to follow-up on; do we follow-up only with Ms. Gannon, or the superintendent, or the Board

- ii. Chris D. said to follow-up with the principle as that is the most effective way going forward; as Board member looking at long-term fiscal responsibilities, in 1.5-2 years will have fiscal cliff; at that time, won't get money from the legislative council as they will say we are getting money from grants, but all recurring costs will go up - with teachers and transportation – so, ones that will give long-lasting benefit and no continuous costs are going to be the programs that will most likely be funded long-term; if can't sustain that funding out 3 years, will be reluctant to start and will likely have to scale back at that time.
- iii. Ann asked if it was prudent to talk to Teresa Ott or is it more under Ms. Gannon's purview?
- iv. Chris D. said looked at this carefully; budget under Teresa went through the roof; last year special education budget was 4 million over the prior year; has to see it calm down; during pandemic; all kids with IEPs had legal remedy to get service; when local people couldn't provide services, had to go to private vendors, and most people that had special education students used that and used those services (OT, PT) and the district had to reach out to private vendors incurred a lot of cost in last year's budget; thinks will step back as returns to in-class placement and services, but last year was such an aberration, so have to be guarded going forward with programs to see how sustainable because was a budget buster this year; are 1.5 million in red this year will make up with federal funds; over 1.6 million are due mainly to additional special education services and transportation, those items alone accounted for 1.6 million of a 1.4 million deficit that just closed; will be careful looking at this going forward, but want to look at social aspects, especially at HHS; but HHS has programs that want to bring to the HHS as well; a lot of social issues to address; things can do for truancy to get kids back in school; if ways to creatively deal and entice kids to be back in school; can use input from SGC on how to improve these things
- v. Eve asked him to clarify how to follow-up on turning the funding for the PPT coordinator position, which is presently grant-funded?
- vi. Chris D. said he doesn't want to speak to the PPT coordinator position, but if it is a long-term, salaried position, they would be hesitant to fund it through the grants.
- vii. Eve asked how to get it changed from grant-funded, who should we follow-up with regarding that.

- viii. Chris D. said how to take needs now and address in the short-term while looking at the long-term; long-term would mean the council funding things out beyond 2 years; for 2 years, we will have grant funds to help school climate, but short-term funds, but hesitant to do long-term funding. Look to the legislative council to give more long-term funding...but most of budget reconciliation has been to cut back on teachers due to decreased enrollment, that is why looking to consolidate schools as well. Getting back to question, it is the struggle with legislative council to come up with long-term funding commitments.
- ix. John H said this makes sense, because pay 4 psychologists almost half a million dollars to be secretaries, doesn't make any sense;
- x. Chris D. said they are working on this; looking to get clerical staff; are people budgeted this year for clerical staff to assist the psychologists so they have more contact time and less paperwork time
- xi. John H. said we have had that before but it goes back; what psychologists could do is slow-down the outplacements because there could be more 1:1 with students and could slow-down the outplacements which is where a lot of cost overrun happens
- xii. Chris D. said that some of these decisions are precisely what we needs to happen; but thinks is persistence of discussions and tying to budgetary part of equation to bring it to fruition
- xiii. Ann pointed out that the school psychologists are available for regular education students as well; to provide supports with mental health for regular education as well; it would be more effective use of their time
- xiv. Chris D. said that could look at this further; if someone wants he can send out the Board of Ed budget that was approved last Tuesday; it is also on the Board of Ed website
- xv. Ann said that yes, it is on the Board of Ed website
- xvi. Ann asked what is next step for Board of Ed budget
- xvii. Chris D. said that budget is based on object codes; within each object code, has to maintain those or have to do budget transfers (he went into further details); so has to stay within line items and there are a couple hundred of them; see trends over years and that is how develop budget for next year, typically within 5% on line-items, except wild-card: special education costs which can change year to year
- xviii. Ann thanked him, and asked if want to hear from the Student-Teacher Committee, or if other sub-committees want to present, and then John H. may want to talk about the school Equity Initiative (moved to Student-Teacher Committee).

d. BUDGET – Melinda Saller

- i. Not present

e. SCHOOL PROMOTION/SCHOOL CLIMATE - Liz Marini

- i. No update; didn't meet

8. School Equity Initiative – John Hanna

- a. John H. said that has names of students and has to help them prepare for next year; his vision without speaking to them is to have them present to the SGC about their unique concerns and perspectives about what can do to build a more inclusive institution
- b. Liz asked if vision is to have them come and speak at each meeting
- c. John H. said there are several groups of students from different organizations; and want to give everyone some face-time, so it may be 2 at one meeting; can figure this out so don't monopolize the agenda
- d. Eve wondered if John H. wants to create Equity sub-committee that has a voting member on the council
- e. John said would be good and it is one way of empowering the community that the SGC is supposed to represent; comes out of Sheff vs O'Neill because minority communities don't have a voice;
- f. Eve said she would propose that there be an Equity sub-committee that has a constant presence like the other sub-committees that present each week and meet and have an agenda that they are working on and pushing forward; she made a motion to make this a sub-committee
- g. John H. said sure, but he isn't sure what protocol is, or whether to do this in the fall, wonders if appropriate given Frank is not here
- h. Nancy said likely don't have quorum today, so might have to table the motion to later until all the members are present
- i. Ann is wondering if this would be a student committee?
- j. John said that the problem is Imani is the first African American student in a number of years; so the EMAC organization ask if we could create a student advisory committee to the SGC; so the African American, Asian, Latino, LGBTQ, and had a group for muslim students, but the advisor no longer works with them; so trying to bring as many different voices to table as possible; about building community, bring concerns and what they would like to get out of the experience or contribute to the experience.
- k. Liz asked if any more questions from John H.; no one responded

9. Old Business

- a. No old business brought up

10. New Business

- a. Liz wondered if it would be easier to meet over Zoom?
- b. Nancy said is more convenient to meet over Zoom, but it is nice to meet in person

- c. Eve seconded that easy to do over Zoom, but doesn't compare for communication
- d. John H. said he is concerned about how it impacts on building relationships;
- e. Liz said easy to get distracted and not fully invested when on Zoom
- f. John H. said there something about getting close and personal and the warm and fuzzy that doesn't occur on Zoom; is more intimate in person and can share more stuff
- g. Ann asked what schedule would be and could we get started earlier?
- h. Liz said traditionally meet on 3rd Monday of each month and technically could meet 8/23/21, so not waiting until 9/20/21
- i. Nancy asked when is the first day of school?
- j. Liz and Ann clarified first day is 8/23/21, but students come 8/30/21
- k. Nancy said maybe could do meeting over Zoom, and then meet in person, or just start meeting in school, not sure what protocol is
- l. Liz said good point, not have answer on this, will have to cross bridge when get closer to it – maybe safer to do meeting over Zoom and then in-person in September if can do so
- m. John H. said that maybe what could be helpful is try to get together before end of June; he thinks there are undercurrents that need to be processed and need to work on trying to heal, and not put it off until the fall
- n. Liz said we can try to do so, but people's schedules are what they are, and may be looking at small but mighty group
- o. John H. said can try, but willing to fail, as better not to let things fester
- p. Eve said that she will gone, and may be hard to herd cats over summer as people begin to go on vacation
- q. Nancy wondered if want to try for 6/28/21; asked Eve if she will be there
- r. Eve said she will be gone 6/23/21; said it will be hard to find time when everyone is there
- s. Liz said taking care of father on 6/28/21
- t. John H. said he understands and life happens and will do it when come back
- u. Nancy said having early August meeting will help
- v. Liz said that she would set meeting schedule for next year and plan for 1st meeting on 8/23/21; she will begin to plan for this
- w. Nancy wondered if there are any statistics on how many students are vaccinated and how successful the clinics have been
- x. Liz said that she doesn't have this data
- y. Nancy wondered if the vaccine will be required in HHS
- z. Chris D. said Board of Education is discussing whether it will be required; CDC is allowing 100% occupancy for events and doesn't think it will be a problem for gatherings like this come September.

11. Adjournment – Liz Marini

- a. Liz thanked this “small but mighty” group
- b. Members thanked her and the other members and wished everyone a good summer, and we wished Imani well

Next SGC meeting: planning for August 23, 2021, 6pm, most likely still on Zoom