

Hamden High School (HHS) School Governance Council

Meeting Minutes

February 22, 2021
6 pm, Zoom Meeting

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

Members Not Present: Judy Goldberg, Mark Gabriel

Guests Present: none

1. Welcome - Frank Dixon

- a. Frank D. opened meeting, welcomed all members, said congratulations again to new members

2. Approval of Minutes - Evelyn Cumberbatch

- a. Eve asked for any input on January's minutes, none offered, motion for approval, seconded, and approved; Eve will ask media specialist to post on HHS SGC website

3. Council and administration Remarks - Liz Marini

- a. Liz brought up idea of Kim Washington joining the SGC meetings in a non-voting and liaison capacity; Liz explained that Ms. Washington is a paraprofessional at HHS, and she is very involved in many aspects of HHS and very knowledgeable of many issues within the school and the town; she would be an effective bridge between the SCG and HHS and also between HHS and the Town
- b. A number of members spoke up and said Kim Washington is a wonderful and valued member of the HHS community
- c. Discussion ensued about whether Ms. Washington could be brought on as a community member and whether there is a limit on the number of community members on the SGC as there are already two; the SGC By Laws were put up on the screen and reviewed; there is a requirement for 2 community members, but it was not completely clarified whether this is a strict limit or whether more than 2 community members would be allowed
- d. However, Liz offered again that Ms. Washington could be brought on in a non-voting, liaison capacity; Frank D. said he thought this could be done and no one in the SGC objected to this

4. Principal's Update - Ms. Gannon

- a. Ms. Gannon discussed the focus on struggling students; the administration is very concerned about struggling students who are having problems with attendance and academics; she went to the Board of Ed last Friday to share concerns; the presentation is on Hamden website: 240 students failed a semester class and didn't earn the ½ credit for the semester; so they are worried about seniors who need that credit to graduate; they are still doing phone calls, home visits, and working so hard to meet students' needs
- b. In a related issue, she discussed that they are considering how to get more students back into the school and classroom; she explained that 268 students are hybrid Mon & Tues, 290 are hybrid Wed & Thur, and 1074 are remote/distance learners; the halls of HHS are very quiet during the daytime; the administration is looking at criteria to pull more students back to school 4-5 days a week; they are looking at equity, at seniors, and at all students; but they can't force students to come to school; families chose for their student to stay at home for various reasons

- c. She explained that elementary students are in-person 4-days and 1 asynchronous-day per week
- d. She reminded the SGC that present 11th and 12th graders need 23 credits and 9th and 10th graders need 25 credits to graduate.
- e. She reported that parents and students provided feedback on a recent survey; students are “Zoom-exhausted” – getting worn-out doing on-line Zoom classes all day; the students really liked the asynchronous learning day each week, but that was phased out
- f. The administration is also thinking about how to honor thriving students.
- g. She will be meeting with the health department on Friday to talk about what celebratory events HHS can have for seniors this year; in mid-March, the governor will let schools know what will be allowed regarding graduations.
 - i. Frank D. asked how HHS compares with other schools in the State.
- h. Ms. Gannon said HHS is consistent with the State and the Country;
- i. She also reported that self-harm behaviors among students have increased a lot; they are providing as many supports, including SWs and PPH staff, as they can; they are trying to come up with different ways to support the kids and families and balance mental health with academic needs
 - i. Frank D. brought up struggle of parents now to continue to encourage high performance but also to lower the stress levels and support their student’s emotional needs
- j. Ms. Gannon reiterated that the lowest grade is a 50% which allows a student to still pass a course for year if can get back into class; she said that the administration is also looking at various credit-recovery strategies as well planning what summer school will look like
- k. She brought up again the difficulty of reaching students without having active HHS email accounts for the students.
- l. Discussion:
 - i. Frank D. said can’t go into budgetary matters, but he asked Greg what they are doing in Fairfield County
 - ii. Greg discussed that the email issue is budgetary matter; he was shocked to learn that his daughter at HHS can’t email her teachers directly except with her private email; he also said that their district is reaching out to kids the same way – doing some house visits; their demographics are different, but many issues are the same; they had to file a recent DCF report; they had two tragedies in Q1 – a student suicide and then the deaths of a student and a teacher; but they are getting through this; they are also trying to get more students into school, but actually more students are leaving to do remote learning
 - iii. Andrew said the email issue brings up major privacy and liability issues; he said he gets emails from random email addresses; he doesn’t know if it’s really the student or actually someone else; he doesn’t respond but tells the sender to message him via the google classroom
 - iv. Melinda said she has talked to many students who say they were never taught how to study, and asked if Ms. Gannon has heard this from students
 - v. Ms. Gannon said that no school has mastered the transition between middle school to high school; she said that HHS is fortunate to have 9th grade teams; 4 core teachers can collaborate and discuss students; also a lot of learning how to study takes place in first quarter of 9th grade; HHS used to provide a summer school class between 8th-9th grades which provided some instruction on the transition and how to study
 - vi. Liz said that she found freshman teams were helpful in identifying students who had limited skills – both study and technological skills – so that they could be offered supports in those areas
 - vii. Frank D. asked Ms. Gannon how college-prep is going during the pandemic
- m. Ms. Gannon said that the administration has been focused on struggling students, and to

ask Mr. Cocchiola, the head of the counseling department, about college prep

5. Board of Education Report – Melinda Saller

- a. Frank D. said that he and Liz will write up some core items that they want addressed, but he asked from the SGC; members can email about any crucial areas for overall growth and welfare of students and any core things that need to be put in draft letter
- b. Frank D. invited Melinda to do update;
 - i. Melinda said that the Board of Ed is starting to work on the budget; they will be getting the budget books on Friday and will start going thru it
 - ii. Last year budget was “flat-funded” by the council; they fear it will be flat-funded again; she said that basically the Board of Ed want to ask to keep all present levels funded; but, when return to in-person school next year, the district will need more money; so, if can’t ask for more, there may have to be cuts in some other services/programs
 - 1. Frank D. asked whether Covid-recovery package out of Washington will help at all
 - iii. Melinda said that if flat-funded will have problems; doesn’t want to lay anyone off or stop classes or programs; just wants to maintain all services/programs at present levels
 - iv. Frank D. commented that nothing has changed; it’s still a Hamden government problem

6. Student/Teacher Committee – Imani Gatson and Jack Purdue

- a. Later in meeting this was addressed: Jack updated the SGC; he has been focused on college applications, which has been time consuming, and so this has been moving slowly, but, he has filled out the forms and will be ready to submit them soon

7. Sub-committee Goals and Members – Liz Marini

- a. Liz had prepared a summary of the sub-committee goals; she said that the last time this was reviewed was in February 2019; she reviewed the different sub-committees and the goals
- b. Safety/Operations/Communication
 - i. Greg offered to join this group
- c. School Promotion/Climate
 - i. Liz wondered if Mark Gabriel still active member; she will reach out to Mark to ask if he is willing to be an organizer of the group
- d. Education/Counseling
 - i. This was renamed Education/School Counseling; as it is a large committee, some members moved to other groups
- e. Mental Health/Supports
 - i. Ann Brought up that there were many more goals listed in the past including issues with Suicide prevention, the Sandy Hook Promise, looking into Mental Health First Aid training
 - ii. Ann also brought up that there will be a lot of mental health issues to address when students return to the in-person learning next year and adjust to the social challenges attending school again
 - iii. Ms. Gannon brought up that the Board of Ed has a Health/Medical subcommittee that meets weekly; also there is another committee just looking at the mental health of students; she said that these are robust and impressive meetings every week involving the police and fire and health departments as well as the school district
- f. Budget – Melinda would be interested to serve on this committee and be liaison with the Board of Ed regarding budget matters
 - i. Frank D. thanked everyone for joining an established subcommittee and is glad that a person is established for each committee to organize the meetings

8. Old Business, Frank Dixon

- a. Frank D. said he wants to get Dan Cocciola, head of the School Counseling Department, to come to one of the SGC meetings; he asked Ms. Gannon how to do this
 - i. Ms. Gannon recommended that the SGC gather questions for him
 - ii. Frank D. offered Eve to do this, but she can't do take this on as she will be traveling in the coming month; Frank wondered if this could be handled by the Education/School; counseling sub-committee
 - iii. Greg graciously offered to gather the questions as part of the Education/School Counseling sub-committee
- b. Frank D. asked Jack and Imani how their college applications are going:
 - i. Jack said he hasn't heard as most of his schools come out in April; the SGC wished him good luck!
 - ii. Imani said she got into Spellman and this is her dream school; the SGC congratulated her on getting into such a stellar college!
- c. John H. again brought up idea of student advisory committee to SGC; an advisory committee of minority teachers and students
 - i. Frank D. said he will put this on the Agenda to discuss at next meeting
 - ii. Ann asked if could it be part of a sub-committee's work
 - iii. Frank D. said he will put as Agenda item, to figure out the purpose and objectives, and then it could possibly be put in conjunction with a sub-committee

9. New Business, Frank Dixon

- a. No new business addressed

10. Adjournment

- a. Motion to adjourn, was seconded, and Frank D. adjourned the meeting

Next Meeting: Monday, March 15, 2021, 6pm on Zoom