



NEW HAVEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Teaching & Learning Committee

April 21, 2021

Online

In attendance: Dr. Joyner (Chair of Committee), Matthew Wilcox, Dr. Iline Tracey, Ivelise Velazquez, Keisha Redd-Hannans, Dr. Paul Whyte, Tessa Gumbs-Johnson, Dr. Richard Therrien, Ellen Maust, Lynn Brantley, Dr. Michele Sherban, Dr. Michelle Baker, Sequella Coleman, Joanne Wilcox, Marisa Asarisi, Barbara Puglisi, Rosalyn Diaz Ortiz, Sandra Clark, Typhanie Jackson, Barbara Puglisi, Cristina Sikorksky, Pamela Augustine-Jefferson, Judith Koret, Kara Buontempo, Shawn True, Derek Stephenson, Charles Warner, Jr. , Pedro Mendia-Landa, Val-Jean Belton, Amy Migliore, Lindsay Maturi, Jorge Rodriguez, Brittany Angus, Jessica Haxhi.

Students: Aleena Chaudry (Coop), Jenna Maynard (Nathan Hale), Jorge Rodriguez (J.S. Martinez), Ali-Jah Steed (Davis), Aaron Steed (Davis), NicDaniel Charles (Coop), Xiomaira Tristanis (Riverside)

Dr. Joyner called the meeting to order at 4:30.

1. How do we conduct this meeting respectfully and effectively? *Dr. Joyner*

Dr. Joyner welcomed everyone to the meeting. He asked the students from Cooperative Arts & Humanities High School and the staff to recall the founding administrators of that school.

2. How is the district organizing to support the new Policy on Race and Equity throughout the district?

Dr. Baker will share the work of the SOAR program along with two of its student members.

Dr. Michelle Baker talked about the SOAR program (Students Against Racism), an anti-racism social justice program she is running with students in grades 9-11. 96 students signed up for the 8-session program from March-December. 52 students attended the first session and there are students from all high schools. There are 15 advisors, at least one from each high school. They have already had two sessions. Students learn how to become student leaders, raise issues about race and discuss policies in schools related to race. They use a compass to gauge where their feelings are and use 6 conditions to sustain and deepen conversations about race (from Courageous Conversations). They use the “4 agreements” from Courageous Conversations in their discussions. Dr. Baker offered to come back to this Committee to offer progress updates.

Aleena Chaudry, Cooperative Arts & Humanities High School, talked about how she now uses the (Courageous Conversations) “compass” every day in all situations, not just conversations about race. She is really enjoying the sessions and the “carefree” environment in which all of their voices are heard. Aleena had suggested that perhaps they could have SOARS in the summer, for students who weren’t able to come before and because it has been so enjoyable.

Dr. Joyner noted that Conversations about Race need to go beyond the “conversation” level to the action level. He asked us to write down the words that come to mind when we think about race. He

also asked the group to respond in the chat to three questions, to be considered again in future meetings:

1. Is racism an example of human failure?
2. What are students expected to do to combat racism?
3. Is racism part of a larger construct? If not, what is the root of the tree?

3. What credits are required for graduation from current district policy? *The district's policy on graduation requirements must be updated to align with the credits required by the State. Dr. Whyte will explain the changes proposed for this Spring.*

Dr. Whyte shared a document that would like this committee to consider regarding the requirements for graduation for just this year/class. He notes that all NHPS schools currently exceed the minimum for state graduation requirements. Based on the special circumstances from this past year, he is asking that the Board allow students to graduate with 25 credits. If students fall short of their particular school requirements, but meet the requirements listed, they would be issued a "New Haven Public Schools" diploma in place of their respective school diploma. This policy would be for this year only; however he also noted that the graduation requirement policy does need to be updated and reviewed. This would happen in the Teaching & Learning Committee.

Shawn True, Principal at Hill Regional Career, said that this change make sense for this year. 26 seniors at his school are potentially falling short of graduation, due to the 29 credits needed to graduate from Hill Regional Career.

Val-Jean Belton, Principal at Cooperative Arts & Humanities High School has 18 students who will not graduate because of the required 29 credits to graduate from her school.

Ms. Haxhi asked about World Languages. Dr. Whyte said that the requirements listed on the document reflect the state minimum requirements. This would only be for this year.

Sequella Coleman asked where students would get their transcripts, especially if they have a "New Haven Public Schools" diploma (versus their school diploma). Students usually go to their schools for their transcripts. Ms. Jackson said that the district is moving toward having an electronic system for transcripts so that students could retrieve them easily.

Dr. Therrien noted that New Haven has a current requirement of 3 credits in science. He is concerned that students will be impacted that wish to go on to future careers.

Dr. Joyner noted that it should be emphasized with the Board that this is simply the response to this year's pandemic conditions. Unless we are in a similar situation next year. Dr. Joyner emphasized that we cannot allow people to forget that we also have a world language requirement.

When we present it to the Board, we must remember to anticipate certain questions and be pro-active with how we present it. It should be presented such that:

1. This plan is directly related to the fact that we are in a pandemic and many students have not had access to the education they normally had.
2. We will not undercut the state mandate for graduation requirements, minimum standards.
3. We will have some standards for the Board to work on in the future, the type of academic requirements that we deem necessary for students to have a high-quality education.

Dr. Therrien explained that back when Garth Harries was Superintendent, they did a presentation to the Board about the current, updated graduation requirements in New Haven. He noted that the universities often expect more than the minimum requirements that the state mandates.

Dr. Joyner asked that Dr. Tracey's staff take a look at graduation requirements and put in a proposal so that we can make decisions aligned with top tier schools.

Ms. Velazquez noted that the June meeting will include a review of graduation policy. The first step is to consider just this year. The types of questions that Dr. Therrien and Ms. Haxhi asked are related to a longer project to look at overall graduation requirements. This is a two-step piece: (1) ask the Board to accept the 25-credit proposal just for this year and (2) tell the Board that we will undertake a longer process to review graduation requirements.

Dr. Joyner reiterated that the presentation to the Board needs to be very clear.

Dr. Tracey noted that students and parents need to be very clear on what the 25-credits means. They need to understand that students may be missing some credits or courses that they might need for certain colleges. Dr. Joyner said that the proposal is "time bound" and only asking for this one thing for this year.

4. How are students engaging in the Visual and Performing Arts through the pandemic? Ms. Ellen Maust will present information about the district's remarkable artists, who have shown their resilience and extraordinary talents in the face of adversity.

Include Visual Arts, Music, Dance, and Drama. She talked about the importance of having "joy" in these classes and a place for students

Ms. Maust explained that the Arts are comprehensive, sequential, and rigorous. They teach knowledge, skills, and concepts. The Arts are a "doing" subject. They are performance-based and meant to develop independent artists, art critics and arts literacy. There is one set of standards for the arts, the National Core Arts Standards (see PowerPoint). They include the skills of "create, perform/present/produce, respond, and connect." New Haven Public Schools was the first district in the state to implement the standards because Ms. Maust and her colleague were on the standards committee. They used the new standards to create units with teachers, in professional learning communities. Teachers worked from their own passion, energy, and experience. There are over 3 dozen cross-district and cross-content units. The units have flexibility from school to school. A stipend-ed group of teachers checks the units to be sure they are relevant, engaging, include consideration of English Learners, and are standards-based. Ms. Maust shared some of the exciting instruments being used in music and media being looked at in visual arts. All schools who have dance and drama are working in the August Wilson Monologue Project; some have gone on to larger competitions. Ms. Maust shared a list of the strategic partners: Yale School of Music, Neighborhood Music School, VH1 Save the Music, Little Kids Rock, New Haven Symphony Orchestra, and the New Haven Chamber Orchestra. All of the partners offer embedded, long term, assistance, and many also offer PD to teachers. She described some of their partnership programs in music. In Visual Arts, she showed Arte, Inc., Yale University Art Gallery, Yale Center for British Art, Artspace, Dwight Hall at Yale, and New Haven Free Public Library. For dance and drama, she collaborates with the Shubert Theater and many others.

Ms. Maust introduced students who will speak about their experiences in the Arts:

Jenna Maynard 5th grade, Nathan Hale School, Ms. Maynard said that she is very lucky to have dance, They learned Irish step dancing. She also dances at performing arts studio B and it makes her very happy. She was miserable when she couldn't dance. She loves art because it helps her be creative and use her imagination. In theater, she can be herself and not worry about being judged. It helps her be more confidence in presentations at school and in dance competitions. Her Arts specials are what she looks forward to every day, even though the rest of the time can be stressful. She loves her Arts classes.

Jorge Rodriguez, 8th grade, John. S. Martinez School, said that both visual and music arts are important for both school and life. He made a number of interesting comments about the Arts, including:

- When you play music, it transports you to another world.
- Music is like a whole other language that anyone can understand
- Visual art is similar in that anyone can understand it.
- There is not enough arts in schools as he thinks there should be.
- He also loves that the Arts has no rules and you can freely express yourself and show your personality.

Aaron and Ali'jah Steed, 8th graders, Davis Academy for Arts and Design Innovation

Ali'jah Steed told the story of "how the arts changed us, moved us and gave us what we need." He talked about how he tried sports but it wasn't his passion. He knew he could sing. He is a generational signer, beginning with his great Grandmother. He mentioned his teachers Mr. Fluker and Ms. Maturi. Band and choir both begin in second grade at Davis Academy. He also created his own music group called the "Davis Street Harmonizers." He was able to perform throughout Connecticut. He chose to stick with choir because it was singing "in a community." Later, was in the Lion King, Jr. performance and performed at New Haven adjudications, and many other events and competitions. The Committee listened to an original song of his.

Aaron Steed talked about singing and playing the drums, noting that his "true passion" is the Arts as well. He also joined the choir and band and studied under Mr. Fluker and Ms. Maturi. The Committee listened to one of his songs that he composed and played with a classmate. He noted that while the experiences of his brother and him were similar "we found our own unique talents and voices through our experiences at Davis. The Arts have been a passage through with we have discovered ourselves and strengthened our academics. Without the Arts, the traditional school experience would not have allowed us to express ourselves so openly and freely."

The twin brothers are hopeful that they will be able to attend Cooperative Arts & Humanities High School in the fall, as they are currently both on the waitlist. To view a video of the Davis Academy Arts & Music Showcase 2020-21, [click this link](#).

NicDaniel Charles, Senior at Cooperative Arts & Humanities High School and Choir Major told us how he started music in 3rd grade with Ms. Sheehan at Brennan-Rogers. She introduced him to classical music and he also began listening to opera. One year, they went to Carnegie Hall and played their recorders. It wasn't until later that he realized how amazing an opportunity that was and he is grateful for it. They also sang at the Quinnipiac hockey game some of the most interesting experiences of his life. He was also introduced to band at Brennan-Rogers. He did the trumpet and sight-reading and it was difficult. He changed to clarinet. He performed with other schools/bands. He said that going to Coop was the "biggest advancement of my life." He said that "his world flipped upside down for the better." He learned that he likes all types of art. He especially loves abstract arts and abstract music. He met

many people who have a passion for choir and music. He was also introduced to theater and dance. He especially enjoys the “community” of choir and the different, but still amazing community of theater. At the end of each performance, he feels “at ease, but extremely energetic.” Last year, he was the lead in Rent! They were very disappointed that they could not perform the play after so much practice, due to the pandemic. He said this year the pandemic has forced him to be more innovative. He noted that in NHPS, he would like to see more equity. In Brennan-Rogers, the offerings for the Arts were limited to one music, one art, and one optional band class. Expression in the arts helped him get through the pandemic and life in general. We need more of that in New Haven Public Schools.

Dr. Joyner said that “joy” is the perfect term because he can see it on the faces of the students and Ms. Maust. He thanked the students and Ms. Maust for sharing.

5. What is the district policy on providing alternate education programs to students in need? *Typhanie Jackson will share the work of the NHPS Work Group on Alternate Educating Programs that is reviewing a proposal on revisions to the district’s existing policy.*

The following presenters joined Ms. Jackson in presenting the PowerPoint attached to these minutes:

Derek Stephenson, Principal, Riverside Academy
Cristina Sikorksky, School Social Worker
Kara Buontempo, Special Education Supervisor
Barbara Puglisi, English Teacher at Riverside,
Joann Wilcox, Mother of a graduate of New Light and volunteer for alternative programs
Charles Warner, Jr. NHPS graduate and Behavioral Specialist at Betsy Ross Arts Magnet School

Ms. Jackson introduced the presentation and noted that they would be looking at what gaps exist, what our current programming is, and how to move forward. She noted that they started their work by looking at the Board Policy (#6172) from the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education on alternative education. They will be coming at another time with recommendations based on that policy. In addition, there has been Public Act about alternative school programming. Many people across the state have been looking at what the optimal experience is for students in an alternative setting. The committee presenting tonight has also been looking at best practices around the state. New Haven also has a rich history with alternative education, such as the previous Wilbur Cross Annex, the previous High School in the Community, etc.

Joanne Wilcox talked about how many working groups have looked at the alternative programs in New Haven over the years. She explained that “students need us to “finally get it right.” She highlighted the following things that they have “learned along the way:”

- We have learned that their needs, on a wide spectrum, are mismatched with resources that don’t serve them.
- We have learned that trauma needs highly trained, and committed care and compassion. Teachers and providers working together, in support of the students and their families.
- We have learned that the possibilities and talents these students have for our community remain untapped if we don’t get honest about their reality. Consistent community that they can learn to count on means us. All of us.
- What is it about the conditions that these students are in for them to finally say to us “yes, you are finally getting in right.” She noted that there have been committees in the past, but we have yet to address the issues with an equity lens.

Kara Buontempo talked about how our current alternative program has areas for opportunity and areas of growth:

- Social-emotional support: we need to support the whole child inside and outside of school
- Curriculum: needs to be relevant and meaningful to students.
- Staff: needs to understand the “whole child” and their vision and mindset must be aligned with the school’s vision and mission.
- Community: We must bridge the gap from home to school and encourage parent and community involvement.

Cristina Sikorsky, School Social Worker said that she has found that a school social worker that they often worked as a triage unit in the alternative setting, reacting to acute ongoing situations. The methodology they used was similar to that of working with trauma victims, a reactive implementation. This limited their ability to spend time on essential pre-work and taking a pro-active lens. In the last few years, they are looking more at programming needs for students and adults, such as community schooling, collaborative approaches to integrate services into the school. A Multifaceted approach is critical, such as exploring professional development, providing materials, providing internships, and placing a greater emphasis on job and life coaching. Personnel is critical and staff must be socially and emotionally intelligent as prerequisite.

Charles Warner, Jr. New Haven Public Schools graduate and Behavioral Specialist at Betsy Ross, talked about how students need in-school supports for dealing with challenges outside of schools. Student are facing medical issues, traumatic home lives, the pandemic, among many other challenges. How do we gear ourselves to make sure students are fully present and able to learn and prosper in the school and elsewhere. The school must provide time and resources to understand how feelings and life experience impact the state of mind of the students. District has implemented “Wellness Wednesdays” as an effort to provide social-emotional support to students and families. Families, students, and teachers need more of this support. Schools need to provide these services to families and students.

Barbara Puglisi, English Teacher, Riverside Academy, said that, as a long-time alternative education teacher, she “truly believes in the power of second chances.” Staff must meet students with an open mind and an open heart. Educators must “dig below” and lay a “foundation for learning” by establishing trust and respect. Curriculum must engage students and incorporate real-life situations. Literacy curriculum must plink the home culture and the school. We must know each students’ stories and recognize that there are reasons for their gaps in learning. She spends much of her time focused on confidence and motivation-building. All learning must be relevant and applicable to life and job opportunities. All of their strategies incorporate their lives and their needs. They offer students something they have “never been offered before.” At Riverside they offer “hope” because, “it is not how you start, it is how you finish.” She talked about how she has also been changed because of her work in the alternative setting. She and her students have become a family as a result of establishing respect and rapport. She said “alternative should be awesome!”

Derek Stephenson, Principal at Riverside Academy, noted that having the right teachers for an alternative setting is essential; it requires a unique set of skills, such as patience and understanding and knowing that students are in trauma and are trying. He asked the Committee to think about teachers in their lives who left both positive and negative impacts on us, that we remember to this day. He noted

that the teacher who left a negative impact was in need of some type of training that they did not have. The deficiencies in staff can increase or decrease attendance of students. He recalled the quote from Maya Angelou, "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will not forget how you made them feel.

He introduced a student, **Xiomaira Tristanis**, a senior from Riverside who came to the school as a freshman, to talk about her experiences.

Xiomaira Tristanis said that her experience at Riverside changed her life. She had difficulty with her education and wanted to give up. The teachers and principals at Riverside were "there for her" emotionally. She had a baby while she was in school and Riverside helped her stay in school, find furniture, take CNA classes, among many other things.

Mr. Stephenson emphasized that relationships with students are critical. Having staff that matches the student is critical. When there is a mismatch between staff and students, things like attendance decrease. There is a need to increase that alignment at Riverside and foster

Ms. Jackson talked about college and career pathways for students, such as increasing number of certification programs and apprenticeships, reimagining credit attainment, and looking at a mastery-based approach to grading.

Mr. Stephenson talked about current programming such as Excel Academy CNA certification, YouthConnect, music therapy, Home Depot, A1 Toyota, etc. but they need the help and support of the Board and the school community. A college and career pathways person is helping to create individualized plans. They continue to struggle with many needs. It needs to be the "top of the priority list." Funding is needed for qualified staff training, smart classrooms and school technology, new furniture, trade programming, a Riverside van to take students into the community, child coaches, work apprenticeships, and stipends for the most qualified staff.

Ms. Jackson reviewed the short-term goals as she noted that we need to hold the whole school community responsible for the alternative:

- Analysis curricular needs /development academic action plan for 2021-2022
- Redesign schedule to increase social emotional learning blocks
- Training staff Check In /Check out model
- Creation of Alternative school committee -annual reporting to the board
- reporting to board
- Increased Community Partnerships-matched to student needs
- Development student need assessment (academic, social emotional, wraparound, care coord.)
- Secure work apprenticeships
- Redesign student –staff mentorship program
- Working with unions and department heads for optimal staffing support

Their short-term goals are:

- Changed perception of alternative school
- Increase alternative school programming options
- Increased Attendance

- 100% Students graduate with college/career plan

Ms. Jackson also presented the following time line for immediate work:

May-July 2021	Analysis Curriculum Needs-recommendations
July 2021	Development Academic/professional development Action Plan
July-August 2021	Identify work apprenticeship sites/certification programs
Aug. 2021	Development of Alternative School Planning Committee check-in calendar
August 2021 – Sept. 2021	Completion of Individual Student Assessments-Individualized student plans

Dr. Joyner mentioned that he went into education because everyone in his household was “at risk.” He recalled his favorite and least favorite teachers and the impacts that they had on him. He said he would like to hear more from the student, Ms. Tristanis, at the beginning of the next meeting. He asked that “part II” of this discussion be at the beginning of the next meeting. He talked about how perfect Mr. Stephenson is as Principal now, and previously Mr. Larry Conaway and Ms. Wanda Gibbs.

Mr. Wilcox said that he appreciated both the Arts and the alternative education program presentations. He noted that there could even be more things listed on the goals for the programs. The programs at Riverside could be a “core of programs that could radiate throughout the district.” Every school in the district needs assistance with alternative programs. He expressed confidence that the team assembled for this meeting is “primed for success” and they can make these improvements happen.

Dr. Joyner said that we can see the connection between social justice and good education and working across perceived differences because we are all “made from the same substance.”

Ms. Velazquez thanked everyone, especially the students and the adults who are centering on “student voice” this year.

Dr. Joyner reminded everyone that Dr. Regina Warner was a transformative leader who changed Cooperative Arts & Humanities into the school that it is now and transformed music education in New Haven.

5. Closing Remarks

Dr. Joyner thanked everyone again.

- **The meeting was adjourned at 6:22.**

The next meeting is scheduled for May 19, 2021.

Future meetings 20-21: Jun. 16

Respectfully submitted,

Jessica Haxhi