

City of Norwalk

Early Childhood Council Minutes-June 16, 2022

Attendance: Mary Oster, Cathy DeCesare, Amaris Melendez, Prema Winn, Michael Crafter, Rovitta Paul, Yazmin Iglesias, Tracey Smith, Vicki Oatis, MJ Chironna, Lauriston Avery, AnaVivian Estrella, Brandalyn Williams, Rob Pennington, Carol Carrozelli

Presenters: Donald Austin and Andrea Sewell, Odyssey (Gayon Mills-Austin)

Call to Order:

Cathy DeCesare called the meeting to order at 10:06 am. A quorum was present.

Approval of the May 19th minutes – Cathy asked for a motion to approve. Rovitta raised her hand, MJ 2nd. Corrections noted. Vote all in favor 9 For, 2 Abstain.

Quality Component-Andrea Sewell and Donald Austin from Odyssey shared a PowerPoint presentation on *A Plan for Collaboration*. Gayon Mills-Austin also attended.

School Readiness:

Membership updates-still looking for someone to fill the business role on the council. Cathy and Carol will review bylaws this summer. Carol mentioned that the legal office sent the RFP contracts to providers. \$545,436,480 SR total, \$37,688 QE. OEC COLA -Norwalk will receive \$170,630.00 to disburse among 8 SR programs. Funds will support salaries/fringe and help with staff retention.

Mary stated that 1300 new I/T spots statewide but preliminary stages. NCC and Lil Critters are interested. Mary also discussed the \$60K COLA for Child Day Care contract programs. Yazmine asked if Family Child Care was included. Mary said no, it's just for funded programs.

Enrollment Updates for Funded Programs:

Carol reported SR- 520 FD/FY slots and 116 SD/SY spots total. 66 SD/SY not filled and 2 SD/SY not filled. 58 of the 68 vacant slots are with RTG and Odyssey because of staffing. Camp Elli has 54 slots out of 80 filled. Amaris shared the camp flyer. MJ Chironna from NorwalkACTS said she would have her advocates distribute the camp info.

Tracey Smith reported on head start. As of May 31st, all remote classrooms opened for 5 days in person instead of 4. Expressed staffing concerns again but hope to have more staff for August. (Currently there are 40 open spots)

SR Updates related to NPS:

Cathy returned to a previous agenda item and gave Amaris Melendez the floor to discuss the 10 SR slots at Jefferson. NECC is the district preschool with 20 SR /SPND services. Due to year-round enrollment, the program runs out of spaces by January and needs to open a 7th classroom. Amaris reminded the group that the council had voted in April to move 10 SR spots from NECC to Jefferson. Amaris explained that Jefferson is now at capacity, and K numbers are increasing with 4 K classrooms. NPS would like to move the 10 spots to Concord Magnet School, 46 Concord St. Amaris mentioned that some details are still being worked out, but NPS should be able to offer spots to families in a few weeks. Cathy added that this should not negatively impact our families. Rovitta asked about NPS staff, and Rob replied that they have the staff needed. Brandalyn asked about the 4th kindergarten at Jefferson—Will it remain a K room in the future? Also, as a parent, she appreciates a plan to keep the inclusion model. Rob said the hope is to

build a new Cranberry School down the road, and the SR spots would move to the Cranberry location. Rob mentioned establishing a natural breaking point for families. Lauriston asked if there were going to be any programs operating at Concord and Rob assured the council that the preschool children would not be alone. Brandalyn asked if the Jefferson numbers could increase past 4 K rooms. Rob said, not seeing that at this point. Rob reminded everyone that there are also choice elementary schools like Wolfpit. Cathy brought this topic to a close. Asked for a show of hands to support a shift of 10 SR spots from Jefferson be moved to CMS. 10 voted yes

Kindergarten Readiness/Registration Updates:

Carol reported that as of 6/14/22, there are 624 K students enrolled. Amaris added that Tracey Elem currently has the largest enrollment, followed by Silvermine School. Carol updated the council on the Pre-K to K workgroup meeting on May 31st. Paula and Denique from Norwalk ACTS helped document, and Tasha from CPHToo, Cristina from Stepping Stones, and Lauriston from Five River attended the workgroup and were generous in sharing information along with the NPS Kindergarten teachers. The information gathered will be edited before the meetings begin again in the fall. The hope is to have a document for teachers and include activities to share with families to support K readiness.

Summer Reading: Vicki Oasis, Children's Librarian, shared a PDF English/Spanish plus a short video about the summer reading program in Norwalk. Many incentives are being offered to families to encourage reading. Any day the children read, they can log in and receive incentives. The information was also emailed to the council.

Cathy gave the floor to Rob Pennington to talk about the new school in South Norwalk.

Rob stated that the location had been determined for the new school. The district wants to start students in the building this fall with 4 kindergarten and 2 preschool rooms (4s only), and NPS would add first grade next year and so on. SoNo will hold 36 Preschool slots that the district budget will fund. Mary asked about hours. Rob said TBD. Rob mentioned that the preschool slots are school day/school year, and the theme for the new school is an enrichment model. Teachers will create groups/themes, and students can choose based on their strengths/interests. Mary asked if enrollment would be for the catchment area. Rob said that the ECE team is still discussing but most likely catchment area only. Cathy asked when the district would engage families in the process. Rob said soon but still working out logistics. Cathy asked to keep the council in the loop as things progress. She also mentioned the possible risk to SR providers with NPS offering more slots. Rob reiterated that the intention is not to take students from providers but to enroll children who don't usually attend preschool. Rob asked how the council would like the school district to communicate news to the group. Cathy mentioned the difference between being part of the decision process vs. being informed after the fact. If the council can be updated to prevent any negative impacts and to help facilitate plans. Rob stated that Amaris is the district point person and the best link to the council.

Rovitta stated that there was no consideration given to the ECE SR providers about the plans. Rovitta heard the news at a meeting on Tuesday, and Odyssey, GS, HS don't know yet. Cathy suggested Rob set up a meeting with the other 4 providers who may be impacted by the 36 new preschool slots.

Amaris said she believes many families can benefit, and it is important to communicate aspects of each program, so families know their options. Rovitta mentioned that CHP recently invested \$14K for playground renovations. Ana asked why Rovitta thinks she can't get kids to fill her SR

spots. Rovitta explained that it is challenging to fill the SR spots right now. Ana suggested that the NPS district saw a need and could add capacity. Rovitta said that there was a more opportune time for NPS to share this information. Rob agreed about communication with the council/providers and keeping everyone better informed. Cathy suggested getting the district and SR providers together. MJ mentioned the fast-paced decision-making and challenges faced by the district. Council members and NPS agreed that things were moving quickly, and communication wasn't as timely as it could have been. Rob plans to set up a meeting for next week to discuss with providers.

Brandalyn stated that families with SPNDS children don't have many school options. If there is a more extensive conversation about families with children SPNDS, she wants to be part of the conversation.

Cathy asked members and Rovitta if we could schedule a Thursday morning meeting to discuss Social Equity & Justice items. The council voted and agreed to have a separate SJ&E meeting in July.

Adjourn Cathy adjourned at 11:44 am.

Respectfully submitted
Carol Carrozelli