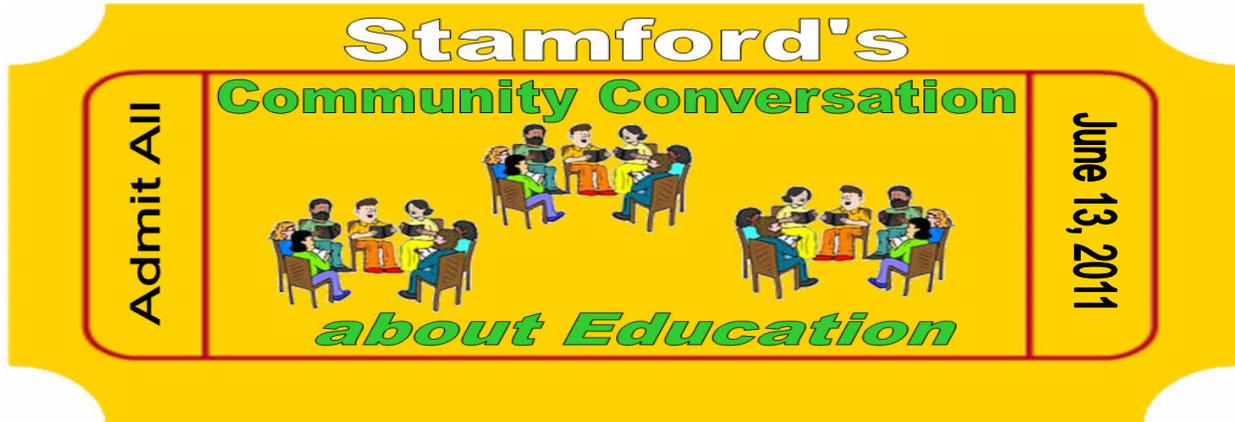




The Stamford PLTI Alumni Association,
Stamford Public Schools, Domus and
Community Partners



COMMUNITY CONVERSATION ABOUT PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

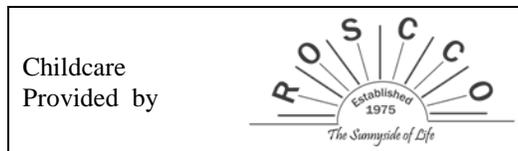
CAFÉ CONVERSATION

May 23, 2011

“Creating a Safe School Environment”

...that is physically, emotionally and intellectually safe

Co-chairs - Eva Weller, Joe O’Callaghan & Donn Reid



Café Conversation about Education: May 23, 2011

Table of Contents

A Message from the Co-Chairs	Page 3
Café Conversation Summary	Page 4
Café Conversation “In a Nutshell”	Page 5
Café Conversation Common Themes	Page 6
Evaluations	Page 7
Moderators, Recorders and Committee members	Page 10

The Office of Family Engagement provides parents with information about, and support to access, available resources in the schools and community. This office promotes partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children.

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June 13, 2011

Dear Friends:

We thank you on behalf of the Stamford Parent Leadership (PLTI) Alumni Association, Stamford Public Schools (SPS), and Domus for helping to make the Café Conversation event – Creating a Safe School Environment - such a success. Together, you comprise a diverse group of community partners who came together to work with the Stamford Public Schools and improve teaching and learning for all Stamford students.

We also thank our key donor, the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, for their loyal support of our efforts year, after year. Now in our fifth year of partnering with Graustein, we see the results of our sustained efforts to secure better educational outcomes for Stamford Public School students. These efforts have attracted and engaged hundreds of interested parents, educators, administrators and agencies to our work. Our community-wide programs have touched in positive ways thousands of children and served hundreds of families.

Superintendent Joshua Starr spoke eloquently at our event and made clear the importance of community ideas, passion and persistence to ensure key initiatives from the community are carried through in the schools. It is through the Community Conversation process and working together over many years that ideas and initiatives have been adopted. Dr. Starr encouraged our work to continue through the SPS Office of Family & Community Engagement and the Parent Teacher Council, even as he moves to his new position in Maryland. We look forward to future collaborations with the new SPS leadership

We especially thank ROSCCO for providing child care, essential to our success, and the numerous volunteers who donated supplies, food and their essential services. We also salute our table moderators and recorders who made the night so productive and allowed us to collect and consolidate the main themes to take forward to the schools.

At least 25 organizations were represented and participated in planning and during the night of the event, along with many individuals and groups to help make the Café a success. Our loyal roster of community partners demonstrates the broad interest and strong passion for improving educational outcomes in Stamford. If you are not listed below, please let us know, so you can be recognized in our final reports.

- Abilis
- American Connection
- Charter Oaks Board
- Domestic Violence Crisis Center
- Domus
- Domus House/Passages
- Learn and Earn, CT
- Exchange Club
- Future 5
- LAAA
- Moms Club
- Parent Teacher Council
- People Empowering People (PEP)
- PLTI Alumni Association
- ROSCCO
- Stamford Academy
- Stamford Achieves
- Stamford Board of Representatives
- Stamford NAACP
- Stamford Public Education Foundation
- Stamford Public Schools
- Stamford Youth Foundation
- Trailblazers Academy
- UCONN
- Urban League of Southern Connecticut

Final reports and related materials will be prepared for the lead donor and available to all participating organizations and individuals in both English and Spanish translation. We are especially grateful for the work of our translators; and to Corine Matarasso and Ana Gallegos for chairing the Café, along with Regan Allan for her valuable assistance in preparing the comprehensive written report.

As you read the report, your ideas and recommendations along with those of other engaged parents, educators and community advocates will be of special interest. We are proud of this latest work together to build better educational outcomes for all Stamford children

With our sincere thanks,

Eva Weller, Joe O’Callaghan & Donn Reid
Community Conversation Co-chairs

The 2011 Community Conversation About Parental Involvement in Education

Café Conversation about Education Summary

May 23, 2011 marked a milestone in a five-year process that began in March 2006, when the Stamford PLTI Alumni Association was awarded a \$2,000 grant from the League of Women Voters (LWV) to hold a *Community Conversation* (“Conversation”) *About Education*, funded by the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund. Several community partners provided valuable services and worked with us each year to improve outcomes for all Stamford students. Stamford Public Schools provided leadership and key personnel to coordinate, provide translation services, outreach and support services. ROSCCO provided childcare, Donn Reid, Domus, Director of Training Services provided professional facilitation at all “Conversation” and public follow-up events.

This year, the community partners decided to focus on the topic of creating a safe school environment with a “Café” model conversation. Six questions addressing topics of physical, emotional and intellectual safety were posed to small groups on May 23, 2011 in the Patio Café of the Government Center. Trained moderators and recorders moved from table to table to pose their questions and the discussions and information were recorded. More than 100 parents, community representative, students, teachers, administrators and caregivers participated. Participants, moderators and recorders represented Stamford’s diverse population and came from all neighborhoods. Findings are presented to the public as part of the civic engagement process on June 13.

Topic: **Creating School Environments that are Physically, Emotionally, and Intellectually Safe**

Schools that consistently strive for positive climates are all about relationships, which determine how well the people within the school treat each other physically, emotionally, and intellectually

Physically:

- **The school building is clean**
- **The school is welcoming and physically appealing**
- **Rules and expectations are clearly defined and posted throughout the school**
- **The school building and grounds are monitored and supervised**
- **Student work is on display and celebrated**
- **Plans for emergency and crisis are well understood by staff, students and families**
- **School staff consistently evaluate the management of the physical environment and correct areas of concern**
- **School staff are visible and a friendly presence in the building, particularly during transitions**
- **Visitors sign into the school and are identifiable with a badge**

Emotionally:

- **School staff are welcoming to all students**
- **Each student is connected to at least one adult in the building for support**
- **Families know who to talk with when they have a concern about their child’s education**
- **Students, staff, and families feel welcomed, valued and supported at the school**
- **Students trust their teachers**
- **Staff trusts their principal**
- **The school encourages a culture of respect for difference and celebrates diversity**
- **The school provides opportunities for conflict resolution**
- **School teaches the skills and allows students to practice managing their emotions**

Intellectually:

- **Students are encouraged to take academic risks**
- **The school consistently holds high academic and behavioral standards**
- **Students and teachers consistently engage in dialogue around learning**
- **Teachers work with others to improve their practice**
- **Students and teachers are held accountable for continuous academic progress**
- **School staff help students explore interests and encourage academic exploration**

Café Conversation about Education: May 23, 2011

“In A Nutshell”

Who attended?

- Over 100 parents, caregivers and community leaders
- Diverse group by race (Caucasian- 27, Hispanic- 32, African-American- 20, Asian- 4, Other-3)
- Diverse group by neighborhood (North- 15, East- 8, West- 9, South- 4, Glenbrook- 9, Springdale- 8, Cover- 4, Others- 15, Not identified- 10, Non-Stamford- 4).

What questions were asked?

1. Do you feel welcome in your child’s school? Why, why not? How?
2. Do you believe your child feels safe at school? How do you know?
3. Who would you call if your child was upset about something at school? Why or why not?
4. Does your school effectively manage social problems when they arise? Teasing, bullying, conflict?
5. Is your child encouraged to be creative and take academic risks?
6. Does your child’s school hold them to high academic standards, and challenge them academically? How do you know?

How did it happen?

- Over one hour of meaningful conversations in small groups of less than 10 participants.
- Each group was led by a moderator and a recorder.
- Moderators rotated among groups, asking different questions and ensuring every voice was heard.
- Recorder wrote down everything that was said in the exact language of the speaker.
- Volunteer transcribed all the recorder notes into this document.

What were the most common themes?

- The Main Office needs to be welcoming.
- If you as a parent are involved in the school and know what’s going, it is a positive experience.
- The atmosphere of the school depends upon the teachers and administration.
- Translation is important.
- There are more issues of safety both physically and emotionally in middle and high school.
- There are safety issues outside of school- buses, afterschool programs and internet related.
- Parents and students need to have a relationship with at least one staff member in the school.
- Kids need to have a relationship with at least one adult in the school.
- It’s hard for kids to be creative when the curriculum is rigid and the emphasis is on testing.
- Parents should have high academic standards for their children.

Café Conversation about Education: May 23, 2011

Common Themes and Ideas

1. Do you feel welcome in your child's school? Why, why not? How?

- The telephone in the Main Office is a problem. It's hard to get a live person.
- If you are involved in the school, you are welcomed.
- The welcoming atmosphere depends upon the administration at the school.
- The front office is a problem. We need welcoming staff there.
- There is a difference in the quality of parent facilitators across the district.
- Translation is important in order to feel welcomed.

2. Do you believe your child feels safe at school? How do you know?

- To feel emotionally safe in your school, it depends upon the teachers.
- Kids don't feel safe with substitutes.
- It's hard to feel emotionally safe in middle school.
- Most felt physically safe in elementary school and middle school, but not in high school.
- It is not safe on the bus.
- Kids don't want to "tell" on each other.

3. Who would you call if your child was upset about something at school? Why or why not?

- In elementary school, you go to the teacher, then principal, then superintendent and then Board of Ed.
- In middle and high school, you go to the guidance counselor and then up the chain.
- If it's a serious issue, you go straight to the principal.
- It's important for the parents to have a relationship with at least one staff member in the school.

4. Does your school effectively manage social problems when they arise? Teasing, bullying, conflict?

- Kids need to have a relationship with at least one adult in the school.
- Technology today is making social problems worse.
- Social issues are more of a problem in middle school and high school.
- There is a segregation problem in high school.
- There are problems afterschool.

5. Is your child encouraged to be creative and take academic risks?

- Afterschool activities can fill the void.
- There is too much prescriptive pacing and test focus.
- Parents need to advocate for more creativity.
- It depends upon the teacher.

6. Does your child's school hold them to high academic standards, and challenge them academically?

How do you know?

- Parents need to communicate with the teacher.
- Academic standards are good, but behavior standards are not.
- Parents need to know the standards and expect their children to achieve them.
- It is better with the middle school reform.
- It depends upon the teacher.
- It's hard for special needs kids.

Ideas: Science fair, students could make a video about bullying, diversity dinner to celebrate culture, a volunteer to welcome visitors at the front desk (parent, student or community member), Principal's Night Out, like the "Mayor's Night Out."

Café Conversation about Education: May 23, 2011

Evaluations

What about this evening did you find most helpful?

I know parents of my community.
When the question us what position your parents should be in
Talking to other parents about issues hearing the opinions of students
Talking with a diverse group of people
Networking with others w/ common goals. Tables/groups mixed, enjoyed having teens perspective.
This evening helped because my opinion was asked for and it helped to know how these problems can possibly be changed.
Learning about situations in schools that I wasn't aware of
The push for diversity at tables. Also the food
Dialog of Discussion
Everyone's opinion and views, Stamford Public Schools has such a diverse community, conversation was pretty interesting
Exchange of Ideas
Everyone giving there own opinion
The exchange of ideas through the conversations
Meeting caring, thoughtful people from all over the Stamford community, many opinion in common
What I found most helpful this evening was hearing everyone's different opinion of the questions
Discovering a lot the issues that parents, schools, student, etc. have to constantly think about/ deal with.
Format was Good
Being Heard
I liked that everyone had a chance to speak and their opinion valued
How open and honest everyone was. There was a great level of respect.
Everything
Lively discussion
Small groups, straight questions that were though properly
Sharing the information about different schools in Stamford
Guiding questions, strict time schedule
Insight on how much the city is trying to help the school system

What could we have done differently to make this event more helpful?

Nothing
Principals, Assistant Principals should be part of this event.
Enforce the "don't interrupt rule" b/c I feel that I was cut off at time before I would finish.
If they could give us more of time.
End earlier, this is a late night for my children
More organized at the beginning – better prepared
Communicate more/send parent link
I thankful nothing was needed to be changed this evening
Our table included students and youth workers and community members but the questions were only directed at parents
No
Somehow made it easier to hear others at the table
Nothing, very satisfied with conversations
Have more questions
Longer time with the moderators
Nothing

I feel for the most parent everything this evening was well done
Spend less time organizing people and spend more answering/ discussing questions. Make questions friendly to people that aren't students or parents.
Moderators made a difference
Very Well Done
More parents
I felt that it was helpful and especially keeping time was helpful
Better AC or Air
No
Not a thing it was wonderful. I learned so much
I think that was well done and wouldn't do anything different
Leave a bit less time for eating and more time for discussion for shorter into' so aren't could end a little earlier
Not much

What types of workshops, information or learning experiences would be helpful to you as a parent, or as a family?
About prevent bullying, about Face Book protection
Well that there should be the same type of program with high school students where seniors will ask questions and freshmen would be mandatory and take workshop.
Parenting adolescents. How to be involved in H.S.
Internet safety, household item – prescriptions, drug abuse, dealing wit grief workshops
Working with Best Practices to navigate schools/district
We talked about communication between families and what can be changed about it. I honestly feel that I get barked at home sometimes and yelled at, and sometimes, I want to just talk.
Again, there are others involved too
Coordinating parents workshops with other social groups to get the word out to parents can improve at parenting
Unsure
Social Networking; Program for gifted student
Have attended so many workshops throughout this school year
The teaching of diversity to teachers and administrators is essential
Nothing
Learning what families feel can be done to help students with behavioral problems
Workshops on how to deal with children being bullied or having any other issues at school
Discussing issues school based
Need café conversations in school among students
Open to all about educational workshops
I would like to learn more about social/mental health services available for young people
Helpful hints for engaging the child in home work and reading
How to make a difference in education even though your child is no longer school age
5minute PLTI
Middle School emotional issues with girls and how its identified and how to help them deal with them
Workshops on enrichment program/ academic curriculum. Standardized Testing
Have more teachers and administrators to level there side

Is there anything else that you would like to know about, or would like us to know about school culture that was not addressed tonight?
The cultural tradition, the economic problems. How is affecting our children's. Educate parents about protect access (access to internet and our children)
What do you teach teachers at workshops
Learning how to get things accomplished in school
Afterschool programs/enrichments

There's nothing else I would like to know about.
What can be done about the way students dress for school. Is anyone paying attention to that or are they just allowing them to show up half naked?
How do you retroactively alter everything a student has learned since birth in order to make that student "functional"?
Cyber/ Student; Off-line
That teachers are asked to take on multiple roles as educators, psychologist and social worker and often are equipped or willing to take on all responsibilities
For the most part all my questions were addressed
I feel that the school cultures in my daughter's school are welcoming how ever, it can always be worked on.
No
No
When is the next meeting, you should do this type of meeting with the high school lads.
Inter-ethnic relations, bus culture / no adult supervision on buses
What is the school doing to close the achievement gap amount there diverse population

Overall, rate this evening's event from 1= Poor to 5=Excellent

Poor	Fair	Good	Great	Excellent
		8	10	12

Other Comments

Just needs to be better organized.

I found this event informative, insightful and very stimulating. It was very well organized.

Café Conversation about Education: May 23, 2011
Moderators, Recorders, Committee Members and Food Donors

THANK YOU!!!

Moderators and Recorders:

Cristina Soto
Laura Lategui
Doris D. Lopez
Greta Espinoza
Sheila Williams Brown
Barbara Boller
Diane Troy
Amy Beldotti
Linda Weatherseed
David Martinez
Jessica Jarahian

Andrea Weller
Mike Hyman
Steve Paul
Crystal Bowles
Doug Taylor
Dwayne Hill
Angie Murphy
Jack Bryant
Dee Burgess
Pat Armstrong

Committee Members:

Xinia Robles
Michael Stein
Juli Harris
Luz Tsiralidis
Valerie Meyers
Angie Murphy
Anu Hooja

Miriam Matos
Regan Allan
Eden Huang
Ana Gallegos
Corine Matarasso
Valerie Lopez
Sheila Williams Brown

Food Donors:

Caribbean Bakery
Panda Garden
Ridgeway Pizza
Pellicci's
Dunkin Donuts (Long Ridge Rd.)

