

# Danbury School Readiness Council

## Minutes

**Date: March 30, 2022    Time: 3:00-4:30pm    Location: Danbury City Hall**

**Attendance:** Claudia Anderson, Michelle Anderson, Kerzell Barnes, Tara Carvalho, Eileen Costello, Sue Giglio, Ligia Hendrie, Yazmin Iglesias, Michelle James, Casey Levene, Anne Mead, Mark Meyer, Jennifer Pane, Elizabeth Quinonez, Marcela Ramos, Thomas Schrack, Maria Vargas, Superintendent Kevin Walston

**Welcome:** Michelle Anderson & **Approval of Minutes:** Michelle James & 2<sup>nd</sup> by Anne Mead (with correction)

**Agenda Item: Mayor's update:** Mayor Dean Esposito stopped by to introduce himself to the Council and shared his appreciation for all the work the Council continues to do on behalf of Danbury's youngest children. He is excited to learn more about the Council's work going forward.

**Agenda Item: DPS Superintendent Update: Kevin Walston**

Exciting news for the Danbury school community is the Danbury Career Academy with a projected opening in the 24-25 school year. This new school will give students in grades 9-12 the opportunity to choose from 1 of 4 career academies. Although there will be no renovation to the current DHS building, the curriculum experiences will be the same. There are concerns about the gaps in learning created by Covid over the last 2 years for all students and teachers have been playing catch up. Eileen Costello added that on the preschool level, programs are also seeing low language and self-help skills. Michelle Anderson noted that at a recent EdAdvance event, Jahana Hayes shared that we have not yet seen the effects of Covid on our children, adding that the School Readiness programs are ready to partner with the Danbury Public Schools on any early childhood initiatives to include preschool teacher training.

DPS found in revisiting an old original plan to add another high school, that a lease avoidance plan called for creating a new preschool center and they have since converted the Granville site with 10 preschool classrooms. They are projecting 4 or 5 more classrooms will be needed and could be solved by adding on to Great Plain School, but no funding is available at this time. Funding for 16 proposed preschool classrooms will be part of the referendum vote on the career academy.

**Agenda Item: Consultant Report: Eileen Costello** (Full report attached and posted on EdAdvance website) Announcement was made that the St. Peter's would be permanently closing their School Readiness program in June. Eileen is working with St. Peter's to place the 36 families receiving funding and assist their teaching staff to find employment with the other programs. Eileen is also reaching out to all currently funded programs to see if they are interested in taking the 36 funded slots so that the Danbury community does not lose them.

**Agenda Item: Michelle Anderson-EdAdvance**

The SR Council is looking to fill positions on the following Committees: Quality Enhancement, Grant Review & Transition. Michelle circulated a sign up for council members interested in participation on a particular committee. The Council continues to look for someone for representation from the business sector. Michelle James will speak with PJ Prunty at the Chamber.

Michelle circulated a letter from both the Mayor and the Superintendent confirming and congratulating their appointment to the School Readiness Council.

An Early Childhood funding grant for parent involvement enabled us to enlist Maria & Marcella to do the family outreach work and add both Kerzell and Thomas to increase parent involvement on our Council.

Attestations were read aloud to Council and put to a vote. Members received copies via email prior to the meeting. Council roles and responsibilities, as well as attestations were discussed.

Motion: Mark Meyer    2<sup>nd</sup>: Anne Mead & Maria Vargas    All in favor/ None opposed.

**Council Member/Community Sharing: Tara Carvalho- Danbury Public Library**

Library is fully open, and masks are optional. Offering a 1x month Spanish language "Ask a librarian" Q&A event. The library is in the process of hiring a new Children's Program Coordinator. Big books are now catalogued and are available for loan for educators. Teachers can apply for an educator's card. May 3<sup>rd</sup>: Ask the librarian night for Spanish speaking families, they are trying to get the word out as this is a gentle introduction to the Danbury Library and the services available. Tara is happy to organize a family night for any organization. They also have new activity kits available: Meeting Milestone Kits for Birth -36 months and Stem Kits for 2yrs-9 yrs.

**Council Member/Community Sharing: Michelle James- CAAWC**

Danbury Works continues to work to fill the position for a Director & Career Navigator. CAAWC has seen an influx of people looking for food and energy subsidies. They currently have housing funds for rent and security deposits for those in need.

**Council Member/ Community Sharing: Sue Giglio-Families Network**

Families Network has revived 2 home visiting programs targeting prenatal through 6 mo. population funded by the Office of Early Childhood. In the process of home visiting program staff and an Outreach Specialist. Currently having difficulty hiring and especially retaining staff. Openings in English and Spanish in the Healthy Families model for children up to 2 years. We are expanding our Board of Directors and gearing up for the April Child Abuse prevention week. Anyone who would like to volunteer their time to line Main Street with pinwheels can contact Sue. The next series of Nurturing Fathers is being held in English beginning in April. Families Network Annual Luncheon is coming up. Michelle Anderson will be sending out an email to Council members to see who is interested in attending. The Council will have a table of 8.

**Council Member/Community Sharing: Elizabeth Quinonez/ Casey Levene- United Way**

The Day Without Childcare event to raise awareness for the importance that Early Childhood plays in our economy was held on March 15th from 5:00-6:00pm at the Danbury Library Plaza and was attended by local providers, parents, and children. Completing the current Community Messengers program soon and will begin Community Cafes. Cora's Kids has 78 providers and currently assisting providers in obtaining a CDA. United Way is offering a digital online community resource to help families living paycheck to paycheck. It offers a marketplace of discounted services and resources for food and financial stability, as well as career/job supports. There is an income qualification piece to it that unlocks discounts/services when your profile is created. An Early Childhood Fair at the Danbury Dome is planned for May 14<sup>th</sup>, more information to come.

**Council Member/Community Sharing: Ligia Hendrie- All Our Kin**

Proposed legislation was discussed around Family Childcare and Early Childhood programs. All Our Kin is working on policy around expanding group home capacities in Danbury.

**Council Member/Community Sharing: Marcela Ramos & Maria Vargas- Family Outreach**

Working through the Early Childhood Collaborative Grant connecting parents and promoting family engagement. Positive Discipline classes were held in both Portuguese (13 families) and Spanish and beginning a series in English next month. We continue to work on engaging more parents by doing outreach out in the community. Marcela noted that parents sometimes do not realize how much they can be doing at home to support their children, there is a need to walk families thru it and guide them to what is important to do at home and why it is important. It is necessary to brainstorm ways to work together with parents, in addition to sharing books and supplies with them. Online groups are positive ways for families to share information and creating events that parents can attend with their children is helpful such as story times at the library and park, as childcare is often an obstacle. As a parent, Marcela is a user of the Sparkler App and can share that info with programs. Liz Quinones added that as a community, many

council members who were on the Promise for Children Partnership started making these connections at the library with the Mind in the Making program.

Next Meeting: May 11, 2022    Location to be announced.