Present: Andrea Comer (CBIA), Robin Golden (BOR), Katie Kelley (ACC), Katie Magboo (BOR), Mary Skelly (CTHSS)

Guests: Marie Allen (NPS), Karen Amaker (NPS/NECA), Sandra Faioes (NPS), Karla Lindquist (DECD), Grace Suh (IBM), Ralph Valenzisi (NPS)

Absent: Tracy Ariel (BOR), Sally Biggs (HMTCA), Dennis Bogusky (AFT), Melony Brady-Shanley (HPS), Mike Breen (CEA), Kate Carter (SWPS), Carmen Cid (ECSU), Elizabeth Cowles (ECSU), Suzanne D’Annolfo (CTASBD), Dolores Garcia-Blocker (NHPS), Anthony Gasper (WPS), Elliot Ginsberg (CCAT), Robert Henderson (MCC), Lori Matyjas (SDE), Stephen McKeever (AFT), Steve Minkler (MxCC), Sal Pascarella (DPS), Arthur Poole (BOR), Manuel Rivera (NLPS), Ray Rosomando (CEA), Gail Stevens (NCC), Gillian Thorne (UCONN), Robert Trefry (CTHSS), Kirsten Wheaton (CB), Dianna Roberge-Wentzell (SDE)

1. Welcome and Introductions
   The meeting was called to order at 9:30 AM by Katie Magboo who welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming down to Norwalk. Introductions were then made.

   Agenda items were rearranged to account for members who might be stuck in traffic.

2. Tour of NECA
   NECA is the first CT-ECO 9-14 model program in Connecticut. CT-ECO programs are modeled after IBM’s acclaimed P-TECH (Pathways in Technology Early College High School) 9-14 model programs. The programs offer students the unique opportunity to earn an industry-recognized, two-year postsecondary degree, along with their high-school diploma within a four to six-year experience. The model enables students to master the academic, technical and workplace skills necessary to enter entry-level jobs in STEM industries or continue their education in four-year institutions. CT-ECO programs feature integrated high school and college coursework, along with workplace mentorship and internships, giving students access to a career ladder and laying the
foundation for lifelong success. The collaboration between K-12, College and the workforce also importantly helps to fill critical skills gaps in growth industries.

NECA is a partnership between Norwalk Public Schools, Norwalk Community College, and IBM. NECA students have the opportunity to pursue an Associate’s Degree in Applied Science in the areas of Mobile Programming or Software Engineering.

Karen Amaker, Founding Director of NECA, brought in four students to serve as tour guides for the group. While she went to ensure that the classrooms were ready to receive guests, the students introduced themselves and answered questions. The group remarked at how poised and well-spoken the students were. Katie and Robin explained that this was due to the Work Place Learning course that every student enrolled at NECA participates in on a daily basis. The Work Place Learning course focuses on the soft skills of industry (communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and problem solving). The purpose of this course is to prepare students for an internship as early as the summer in between their 11th and 12th grade years. Students also each have an industry mentor to help guide them through their professional development. Grace Suh of IBM explained that the Workplace Learning curriculum design is reevaluated each year to accommodate for the needs of students as they mature and progress through the program.

While on the tour, participants had the opportunity to visit each of the four classrooms and see two Web Development classes, a study hall, and a workplace learning class. Web Development is a college level course that was offered to all first year NECA students. The students in these two classes were seen working together to solve the problems they encountered and the teacher served in a facilitating role. Collaborative problem solving is at the heart of all CT-ECO program curriculums and designs.

3. Question and Answer Session with the NECA Steering Committee Members
Karen Amaker – Founding Director, NECA
Grace Suh – Manager, Education, Corporate Citizenship and Corporate Affairs, IBM Corporation
Ralph Valenzisi – Chief of Technology, Innovations, and Partnerships, Norwalk Public Schools

Because of the small size of the group, this was structured more as a free flowing conversation. The group began by sharing out their thoughts and reactions to the tour.

Karla Lindquist remarked that she was impressed with the level of maturity students displayed and the tangible sense of community amongst the students. She was surprised that such young students were studying ethics and could speak about ethical dilemmas. Mary Skelly echoed Karla’s sentiments and added that she was surprised that 9th grade students were taking a college level course. Robin explained that this is not typical and that a grant was secured to pay for these courses. Karen added that college courses will not be offered in year one to future NECA cohorts because many of the students are not mature enough to be successful.
Andrea Comer asked how many students were currently enrolled and how many were projected for next year. Karen stated that there were 84 students in the first cohort and they have 60 accepted students for next year. Applications will continue to be accepted for next year through the first week of school or when the enrollment gets to 100 students. A question about how many students in the first cohort were on track to finish all high school and college requirements in 4 years was asked. Karen explained that presently 16 students were on the four year track. The remaining 68 are on either the 5 or 6 year track but it is too soon to tell exactly how many are on each.

Karla then asked about the attrition rate and Karen explained that inevitably given how young students are when they start the program, they expect to lose a few. This first cohort began with 89 students and now has 84. Karen and Ralph expect that they will lose one more student at the end of the school year. Karen explained that students leave for a variety of reasons but the biggest one is that they want to be with their friends who are not in the program. Next year, the NECA team has worked to ensure that while students will travel as a cohort, they will have the opportunity to go up into the traditional high school more often and see their non-NECA peers.

Katie Kelly then asked about the challenges associated with scheduling the college courses. Ralph explained that Tom Duffy, the Chair of Norwalk Community College’s Technology Department and Steering Committee member was really the expert on this issue. Tom is very creative when it comes to scheduling but the major challenge is with Norwalk High School’s 8 period rotating schedule. Because the College operates on a static schedule, it is impossible for the high school schedule to be accommodated. The school district is considering placing the 16 students on the four year track on a different schedule where their morning will rotate but their afternoon will be static. Ralph went on to explain that the rotating schedule will only remain an issue until the end of next year. After that beginning in the fall of AY 2016 – 2017 Norwalk High School will move to a block schedule that should help to resolve these issues.

4. **Budget Update and Legislation Update**

Robin explained that the current difficult budget session will result in changes in staffing. More information will be shared at future meetings. She then went on to share a general overview of the remaining Early College funds. A more comprehensive budget detail will be shared with the Steering Committee at a later meeting. She explained that with no new funding projected for Early College Initiatives for this biennial budget cycle, she and Katie have been working with the system office on the best use for the remaining Early College funds (the original source of these funds allows for roll-over of the funding). The priorities that have been identified are: first, to allow the colleges to revise their budgets for funding that they have already received in order to support their activities for as far into the 2015-16 academic year as possible (a comprehensive status report will be provided in the June report); second, to ensure that the existing and three planned Connecticut Early College Opportunity (CT-ECO) programs have some guaranteed support until a sustainable funding system for the college courses can be identified.
Robin then went on to explain that because the legislative language to recognize CT-ECO programs was not submitted to the Higher Education Committee with enough time to have a full public hearing during this Legislative Session, we will need to wait until the next session in 2016 to present the changes to the statues for both Higher Ed. and K-12. She and Katie agree with the Higher Education Committee that a program as transformative and important as CT-ECO deserves a hearing and feel that this additional time to prepare is important.

On June 5th, 2015 a State-Wide convening of all CT-ECO programs at Gateway Community College. This day will serve as an important milestone as all of the CT-ECO programs come together to build a community and develop a shared understanding and vision for the model.

We will be using the first two hours of the event to introduce the model to invited community members, legislators and other elected officials. CT-ECO partners and supporters will be inviting their local legislators to the June 5th event (which is after the end of the current session) - see attached invitation. Stan Litow from IBM will be speaking as will the dynamic Director of the Brooklyn P-TECH and students from Brooklyn and from our Norwalk program.

The afternoon will focus on in-depth work amongst the current and potential CT-ECO programs. Having all of the programs come together to share their plans and learn and grow from one another is especially critical given the fiscal crisis that faces our State. Finding creative ways to structure and fund the programs until the financial climate improves and funding can be appropriated will be vital to ensuring sustainability.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 AM.