

LWV OBSERVER REPORT FORM

Board or Commission: West Hartford Board of Education

Date of Meeting: March 17, 2009

Members present: Harry Captain arrived late

Nature of meeting Routine X

Special _____

Called to order (time): 7:07 pm

Adjourned (time): 9:28 pm

Action taken:

Main agenda items were approval of a revised board policy on instruction and goals, a decision on the school calendar for 2010-11, a change in the last day of school for this year, a motion to modify the school calendar for 2009-10, and non-renewal of non-tenured personnel.

During an unusually long public communications period, a number of community members addressed the board regarding the proposed education budget for 2009-10. Most spoke in support of items that are being considered for reduction, such as world language and all-day kindergarten.

With little discussion, the board adopted 6-0 revised board policy 6000, which updates language regarding instruction and goals. For the complete policy please see

<http://www.whps.org/board/agenda-documents/20090317/Policy%206000%20Goals%20second%20reading%203-17-09.pdf>.

The board approved 6-0 school calendar "Option B" for 2010-11, which calls for a start before Labor Day, a shortened February vacation, and a full April vacation. The board's decision was consistent with the results of an online survey in which parents, teachers and students were asked to express their preferences. This calendar may be modified after discussions with local veterans groups to open school on Veterans Day. To see the approved calendar go to

<http://www.whps.org/board/agenda-documents/20090226/2010-2011%20large%20calendar%20before%20labor%20B.pdf>.

The board approved 6-0 a motion to end school this year on Friday, June 26. Otherwise, school would have continued into the following week in order to make up snow days.

By a 6-0 vote, the board agreed to open school on Veterans Day, November 11, 2009 and to change the last day of school next year to June 17, 2010.

The board accepted 6-0 the administration's recommendation for the non-renewal of non-tenured teachers' contracts. Because this is a personnel matter, the list of teachers affected is kept confidential.

The superintendent's report dealt with three items: the new Bristow principal, the Open Choice program, and the federal stimulus package as it may affect West Hartford.

Dr. Sklarz announced that Andrew Morrow has been selected to replace retiring Bristow principal Jeannie Camperchioli. Mr. Morrow has an undergraduate degree from Notre Dame, a Masters from Miami University, and is currently studying for his PhD at Seton Hall. He has taught social studies, served as an assistant principal in Arizona, and is currently principal of Odessa/Montour Middle and High School in New York. His three years at Odessa have witnessed a double-digit improvement in test scores and a reduction in disciplinary referrals.

Director of Finance and Planning Chip Ward presented a report on the Open Choice program, which places minority students from Hartford in surrounding suburban schools. Back in the mid-1980's, when West Hartford experienced declining enrollment, we admitted almost 300 Open Choice students, but those numbers declined with our increasing resident student population throughout the 1990's and reached a low of 18 in 2000-01. We now serve 89 Open Choice students, who are admitted in grades K through 2 on a space-available basis. The state pays us \$2,500 per child, plus a bonus of \$463 per child when there are 10 or more enrolled in a school, which is the case at the 4 elementaries they attend: Braeburn, Bugbee, Duffy, and Morley. We also receive a separate additional grant from CREC of \$3600 per child for students enrolled in full-day K and are reimbursed the full cost of any special education services required. Total funding for this year is \$273,000, which is sufficient to cover the marginal cost of educating these students. CREC has administered the Open Choice program, but now the state is taking over and requesting that we commit to taking another 70 students next year, including 59 in grades 7 through 10. Currently, the state cannot compel a district to accept Open Choice students.

Mr. Ward also reported on a meeting held by the state Department of Education on March 16 regarding funds available to local school districts through the federal stimulus bill (ARRA). The amount available for West Hartford will be larger than previously estimated--\$3 million versus \$2.6 million—and it must be accounted for separately from other federal monies. It remains unclear, however, how useful this money may be because of the restrictions place on it. The programs through which it will flow, Title I and IDEA, require that new funds be used to supplement, not supplant, local funds. In our current fiscal situation, where we are struggling to maintain current levels of service, more flexibility in the use of these grants would be welcome.

In the financial report, financial examiner Diane Mudge reported that the district is projecting a year-end surplus of \$295,000 due to one-time surpluses in the transportation and tuition accounts. If this surplus holds, it will be returned to the town general fund. A freeze on hiring and overtime is in place for the remainder of the fiscal year.

The board announced changes to its schedule of budget-related meetings. The new schedule is:
March 26 – Budget Workshop #3, preceded by a public comment period
March 31 – Public Hearing on the Budget, Workshop #4 immediately following
April 7 – Regular Board Meeting, budget adoption
All will take place at 7:00 pm in room 314 at Town Hall.

Observer name: Kathy Wilson