

LWV OBSERVER REPORT FORM

Board or Commission: West Hartford Board of Education

Date of Meeting: March 26, 2009

Members present: All

Nature of Meeting *Routine* _____

Special Budget Workshop _____

Called to order (time): n/a

Adjourned (time): n/a

In an unusual move, the board allowed public comment at this budget workshop, the main purpose of which was to discuss options for reducing the superintendent's proposal for 2009-10. Several members of the public spoke, generally expressing concern about possible cuts to specific programs, most commonly foreign language.

The board first heard an update from Chip Ward, Director of Finance and Planning, on how West Hartford may benefit from the federal stimulus package (ARRA). Mr. Ward indicated that there is still considerable uncertainty about how school districts may use these funds, which will flow through existing Title-I and IDEA grant programs that impose restrictions on the use of the monies they provide. Both require school districts to maintain "local effort" and to use grant funds to supplement, not supplant, local funding. It therefore appears that ARRA funds must be used for things we do not currently do that are also consistent with the legislation's intent to provide short term investments that will reap long term benefits. The likely bottom line is that we will not be able to use ARRA funds to offset current, ongoing budgetary needs.

The board then reviewed an administration-prepared list of options for reducing the superintendent's proposed 2.87% budget increase, which may be viewed at <http://www.whps.org/budget/0910/Budget%20reductions%20-%20March%2026,%202009.pdf>. The mayor has instructed the board to adopt a budget with no spending increase. The first part of the list was a series of adjustments based on updated information that enable a reduction of about \$835,000, which would take the budget increase down to 2.2%. The second part comprised 21 items, ranked according to impact on the district, totaling nearly \$2.55 million and 40.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions that would take the increase down to .13%. The third part presented 6 additional options that the administration considers the most damaging, including increasing elementary class size, total elimination of Quest, full elimination of elementary World Language, restructuring REACH, reducing elementary curriculum specialists, and elimination of full-day K at 6 schools. Partial cuts of Quest and elementary World Language were among the 21 earlier options.

Apart from the adjustments, the vast majority of the options presented appeared distasteful to the board. Jack Darcey stated unequivocally, for example, that he will not vote to reduce the assistant principals at Smith and Charter Oak, Clare Kindall expressed discomfort with trimming Quest and K-8 music, and Harry Captain defended middle school interscholastic sports. The further down the list they went, the greater the board's unhappiness about the cuts became, and in the end they even agreed by consensus to take reductions to full-day K off the table.

The next board meeting will be a public hearing on the budget, immediately followed by a final workshop, beginning at 7 pm on Tuesday, March 31, in room 314 at Town Hall. The board will adopt a budget at its April 7 meeting.

Observer name: Kathy Wilson