

LWV OBSERVER REPORT FORM

*Board or Commission: West Hartford Board of Education*

*Date of Meeting: April 21, 2009*

*Members present: All but Terry Schmitt, who participated via speaker phone*

*Nature of meeting Routine X*

*Special \_\_\_\_\_*

*Called to order (time): 7:06 pm*

*Adjourned (time): 8:30 pm*

*Action taken:*

The main item on the agenda was approval of the budget for 2009-10. The board passed unanimously a spending plan totaling \$123,306,323, which represents a \$3,547,117 reduction from the superintendent's proposed budget and is \$3,817 (.3%) lower than the current year's. The reduction comprised three broad categories: technical adjustments, special savings opportunities, and final budget reduction options.

**Technical adjustments** totaled \$1,844,733, the bulk of which came from lower projected costs for utilities (\$786,053) and health/medical (\$503,830). \$360,000 of the utilities savings is an adjustment in the schools' contribution to the town/board energy fund based on lower costs for this year. A similar adjustment will apply in 2010-11, but will disappear in 2011-12.

**Special savings opportunities** totaled \$1,550,000 and came from the use of federal IDEA stimulus funds (\$1,000,000) to partially cover the increase in special education costs and the use of current-year surplus (\$1,100,000) to prefund \$550,000 of energy expenses in each of the next two years. Along with the energy fund adjustment noted above, these savings are of two-year duration and all together their disappearance will leave a \$1.9 million hole in the 2011-12 budget that will have to be filled from the general fund.

The existence of a \$1.1 million surplus for the current year was something of a surprise based on prior financial statements, the most recent of which showed a projected surplus of only \$295,000. Three major sources, all of which are non-recurring, generated most of the surplus: \$500,000 in liquidated damages from First Student for failing to have working video cameras on all school buses, \$330,000 in unused accumulated sick leave funds due to fewer-than-expected retirements, and \$250,000 in additional state reimbursement for special education excess costs.

**Final budget reductions** totaled \$298,550 and were chosen from among the previously discussed list of options, with the exception of Extended Day Programs at Smith and Charter Oak (\$68,550), which were a new addition. These programs at our two intra-district magnets are intended to provide additional academic instruction to students who are struggling, as well as enrichment opportunities. It is hoped that federal Title I stimulus funds can be used to reinstate them. The other major cut in this category was another \$140,000 for textbooks, which had already been reduced by \$95,000 (16%) in the superintendent's original proposal.

A detailed breakdown of all the adjustments to the superintendent's budget are available at <http://www.whps.org/budget/0910/BOE%20Adoption%20Night%20-%20April%2021,%202009.pdf>.

Superintendent David Sklarz announced that the unions representing maintenance and administrative employees have agreed to wage freezes for their members, which will allow restoration of the 2 maintenance and 2.65 department supervisor positions eliminated in the 2009-10 budget. These cuts were retained in the adopted budget because union membership has not yet formally voted on the concessions.

The board adopted unanimously final plans and specifications for asbestos abatement and floor replacement at Sedgwick Middle School. Two-thirds of this project is eligible for 40% reimbursement from the state. It involves removal of worn carpet glued to asbestos floor tiles, removal of the tiles, and replacement of the floor. Work should be completed over the summer.

Director of Human Resources Rick Ledwith reported that the district has received notice of only 5 retirements so far this year, versus an expected total of 35. He attributed the lower number to the uncertain economy and said he expects a final total of perhaps 15 for the year.

The next board meeting will take place May 5 at 7:00 pm in room 314 at town hall.

*Observer name: Kathy Wilson*