

LWV OBSERVER REPORT FORM

Board or Commission: West Hartford Board of Education

Date of Meeting: June 16, 2009

Members present: All

Nature of meeting Routine X

Special _____

Called to order (time): 7:04 p.m.

Adjourned (time): 9:21 p.m.

Action taken:

The main items on the agenda were ratification of union contracts, transfer of crossing guards to the board from the town, and a report on the uses of federal stimulus (ARRA) funds.

Before regular business got underway the board saluted superintendent David Sklarz, for whom this was the last meeting prior to his retirement June 30. Members cited Dr. Sklarz' numerous accomplishments during his 14 years of service to the district, including extensive renovation of the physical plant, improvement in standardized test scores, implementation of a very effective tenure review process, recognizing talent by promoting from within and allowing principals to run their own buildings, and providing a positive vision that encouraged all students and staff to strive for excellence. Dr. Sklarz responded by saying it was an honor to serve in West Hartford. He thanked the board, community, and staff for their support over the years and expressed the hope that he leaves the district better than he found it. He also expressed confidence that the schools will be in good hands under incoming superintendent Karen List.

The board unanimously ratified new contracts with administrators, maintenance workers, printers, and cafeteria staff. All four contracts freeze wages for 2009-10 and extend the duration of the agreements by one year, to June 30, 2011 for the administrators, to June 30, 2010 for all others. Impact on the budget adopted by the board in April is negligible because the administrators and maintenance agreements were taken into account at that time. There are only two printers and the cafeterias operate under a separate fund outside the regular budget. However, lunch prices will not increase as previously planned, due in part to savings generated by the wage freeze.

The board unanimously accepted transfer of the school crossing guards from the town to the board of education. The switch is being made because the board establishes the school year, which sets the guards' work schedule. Supervision and assignment of guards will continue to be handled by the police department, and police will continue to fill in as necessary for absent guards. \$376,500 was transferred from the town to the education budget to cover the cost of wages, uniforms, and social security for these personnel.

Assistant Superintendent Karen List and Director of Finance and Planning Chip Ward reported on how the district plans to use funds available under the federal stimulus plan (ARRA). These monies fall into 3 categories: Title I (at risk students), IDEA (students with disabilities), and State Fiscal Stabilization (SFS) funds.

\$581,624 is available under Title I and will be allocated over the next two fiscal years to improve teaching and learning at the district's four elementary schools that qualify under Title I: Charter Oak, Smith, Webster Hill, and Whiting Lane. Funds will be used for: extended day programs at Charter Oak and Smith, two parent liaisons shared among the four schools, math and reading tutors at all four schools, and professional development to help teachers at the four schools implement the Scientific Research Based Intervention (SRBI) model.

\$2,567,437 is available under IDEA and will also be allocated over the next two years. \$1 million will be used each year for special education expenses that were transferred from the general fund under the board adopted budget, leaving \$567,437 for discretionary expenditures. These will include: a part-time administrative consultant and additional consulting time from EDC to advance the recommendations made in the EDC report, professional development, assistive technology, a data management system for assessing and monitoring student progress, two vans to support applied learning opportunities for secondary and post-secondary students, and additional instructional materials and supplies.

If all goes as state budget watchers expect, the district should receive approximately \$2.4 million from the (SFS) grant in 2009-10, which will replace a like amount of ECS funding, so that our total from the two grants should equal the total \$16 million we received in ECS funds this year. However, since the state budget has yet to be adopted these funds are not entirely assured. The adopted town budget assumed receipt of the full \$16 million.

Go to <http://www.whps.org/board/agenda-documents/20090616/Use%20of%20ARRA%20funds.pdf> for details on the uses of ARRA funds.

Human Resources Director Rick Ledwith announced in his end-of-year personnel report that Julio Duarte, currently a guidance counselor at Conard, will replace Assistant Principal Paul Vicinis while the latter is on active military duty in Afghanistan. Mr. Duarte has participated in the district's Leadership Academy, which grooms in-house staff to assume leadership positions. He also reported that Smith Assistant Principal Robert Arciero is leaving at the end of the school year to assume a principalship in Wallingford. Mr. Ledwith stated that overall turnover in the district is down considerably this year to about 3% versus our normal 8-10%, that announced retirements total only 8 to date versus our normal 25-30, and that the last few openings for next year are being filled now.

In his superintendent's report, Dr. Sklarz noted that both Conard and Hall are on Newsweek's annual list of top American public high schools, with only Farmington High School ranking better than Conard among Connecticut schools. He also reported that the district-wide Energy Challenge has saved \$154,000 in energy costs this so far year.

The financial report for the period ending May 31 projected a budget surplus for year-end (June 30) of \$355,000, which will be returned to the town. Harry Captain suggested that the board and the town begin talking soon about setting up a reserve that could help in two years to fill the holes that will be left by the one-time federal monies that are propping up our budget now.

This was the last board of education meeting for the school year. The next meeting will take place on Tuesday, September 1, at 7:00 p.m. in room 314 at Town Hall.

Observer name: Kathy Wilson