

LWV OBSERVER REPORT FORM

Board or Commission: West Hartford Board of Education

Date of Meeting: September 1, 2009

Members present: All except Diane Mudge (Bruce Putterman participated via speakerphone)

Nature of meeting Routine X

Special _____

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

Adjourned (time): 8:51 p.m.

Action taken:

The main item on the agenda was a briefing on the opening of school. Each member of the WHPS executive team reported on her/his area of responsibility. Highlights are provided below. Complete reports may be viewed at <http://www.whps.org/whps/primary-offices/boe-page/documents>.

Superintendent Karen List stated that she and Assistant Superintendent Eileen Howley visited every school during the first two days and that things were going smoothly. She is in the process of scheduling listening forums at all schools and with the community in order to facilitate communication among parents, WHPS staff, and residents.

Dr. Howley addressed progress over the summer on the District Improvement Plan, textbook purchases, summer programs for struggling students, the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program (IBPYP) at Charter Oak Academy, Summer Institutes for new teachers, a program at Taft School preparing teachers for leading Advanced Placement courses, and the status of West Hartford's Transitional Language Programs. She noted that her department's name has been changed to the Office of Instruction and Curriculum to reflect the primacy of high quality teaching in educational success.

Assistant Superintendent for Administration Timothy Dunn reported on activities in the areas of buildings and grounds, summer school, information technology, transportation, and student enrollment. He noted that all construction and renovation projects came in on time and on budget and that pupil transportation has experienced only minor glitches in the opening days of school. He does not expect problems with the bus company failing to meet contractual standards (for which WHPS collected hundreds of thousands of dollars in damages) as was the case last year.

Mr. Dunn was accompanied by Health District Director Steve Huleatt who reported on steps to combat an expected outbreak of H1N1 flu during the school year. A letter has been sent home with all students and there is information on the WHPS website at <http://www.whps.org/whps/h1n1>. New guidelines for keeping ill students home and for potential school closure are in place stating that students should remain home until they have been fever-free for 24 hours and that schools will remain open unless an outbreak becomes particularly severe.

Director of Human Resources Rick Ledwith reported that turnover was 5% this year, versus 11% last year. Only 8 teachers retired, compared with 20-30 normally, and the remainder left for a

variety of reasons including relocation, family reasons, and other positions in state. Mr. Ledwith also outlined orientation and mentoring programs for new teachers, as well as steps being taken to increase the racial and ethnic diversity of WHPS staff, now at only 5.5%. The district's goal is diversity of staff equal to the diversity of the West Hartford community.

Pupil Services Director Glenn McGrath stated that, for the first time in a number of years, all positions in the department were filled as of the first day of school. Normally, the full complement of paraprofessionals is not achieved until the year is well underway. Mr. McGrath attributed this year's situation to the fact that 10 positions were eliminated from the budget this year. Mr. McGrath also talked about staff development and priorities and initiatives for the year. He reported that the guidance department will be rolling out a new curriculum based on the latest state guidelines which, among other things, requires an increased focus on a grade 6 to 12 continuum of services and use of technology.

Director of Finance and Planning Chip Ward reported that elementary enrollment came in at 231 classrooms, as budgeted, and that all but one or two are within size guidelines. Middle and high school enrollment is also very close to projections, with both high schools currently above 1500 students. The district ended the 2008-09 fiscal year with a \$377,231 surplus, which has been returned to the town council. A summer inventory of phone lines and charges, plus a switch to a new carrier, should produce a savings to the district of approximately 40%, or \$5,000 per month.

The next board meeting will take place on Tuesday, September 15, at 7:00 pm in room 314 at Town Hall.

Observer name: Kathy Wilson