

LWV OBSERVER REPORT FORM

Board or Commission: West Hartford Board of Education

Date of Meeting: September 15, 2009

Members present: All but Bruce Putterman

Nature of meeting Routine X

Special _____

Called to order (time): 7:03 pm

Adjourned (time): 10:00 pm

Action taken:

The main items on the agenda were amendments to Board Bylaw #8357, revisions to four board policies, reports on state standardized test results and on Annual Yearly Progress under the federal No Child Left Behind law, and the Financial Statement for the 2009 fiscal year.

A motion was offered to amend Bylaw #8357 Regarding Content of Board Meeting Agendas, with the stated objectives of providing greater flexibility by eliminating the prescribed order of agenda items and greater efficiency by adding a consent agenda. This would allow substantive matters/reports not requiring a vote to be heard at the beginning of meetings when members are fresher and routine matters to be voted upon without discussion. The proposed changes met with numerous objections, both from board members and the public, including concerns about a lack of predictability if the prescribed order were eliminated, a lack of transparency for consent items (particularly the Financial Statement), and reduced opportunity for public comment. Given the number and seriousness of these objections, the motion was withdrawn and further work will be done in sub-committee. Text of the rejected amendment may be found at <http://www.whps.org/board/agenda-documents/20090915/attachment%20IV%20A%20bylaw%208357.pdf>.

A motion was offered to accept as a first reading revisions to Board Policies #5670 – Insurance, #5690 – Suicide Prevention, #5710 – Questioning and Apprehension, and #5720 – Search and Seizure. These revisions are part of an ongoing multi-year review and updating by a Board sub-committee of all Board policies. The revised insurance policy, which governs student accident insurance, was referred back to the sub-committee because of questions about exactly whom it was intended to cover and what coverage is currently offered, particularly pertaining to the middle school track and cross-country program. The suicide prevention policy was also referred back to committee for rewording and clarification of the frequency of staff training. Likewise, the questioning and apprehension policy was referred back to committee amid numerous questions about the authority of administrators vis a vis the police and concerns about students' rights. Policy #5720 regarding search and seizure was accepted 6-0. To view the complete proposals, go to <http://www.whps.org/board/agenda-documents/20090915/attach%20IVB%20revision%20of%20policies%20plate.pdf>.

Assistant Superintendent Eileen Howley and Director of Finance and Planning Chip Ward presented a report on 2009 CMT and CAPT results for West Hartford. Overall, scores were the highest ever on both exams. The CMT tests students in grades 3-8 in reading, writing, and math, plus science in grades 5 and 8. Longitudinal analysis of science results was not offered because it had been part of the CMT for only a short time. The CAPT tests grade 10 students in reading,

writing, math, and science. New for the 2009 was the Modified Assessment (MAS), an alternative test for reading and math taken by the lowest performing special education students. MAS results were not incorporated in CMT or CAPT results for 2009, and consequently reported scores increased in reading and math compared to 2008, when all students took the regular CMT and CAPT tests. Taking the MAS into account, however, West Hartford's scores were still the highest ever. Even so, considerable achievement gaps remain between poor, special ed, and minority students and their peers, and West Hartford's gaps remain larger than our peer DRG B districts. And, although considerable progress has been made toward the Board's ambitious long term objectives for student performance, we are still far from meeting our goals for special ed, minority, and low-achieving students – though we are closer on the CAPT than the CMTs. The full report on district test results may be viewed at <http://www.whps.org/board/agenda-documents/20090915/VB1%20CMT,%20CAPT.pdf>.

Dr. Howley and Mr. Ward also presented the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) report for the 2008-09 school year, which is based on the spring 2009 CMT and CAPT results. AYP is assessed both at the district and school level, and in order to make AYP the whole district or school and all subgroups (ethnic/racial, special ed, English language learners, disadvantaged students) numbering over 40 must reach both participation and performance targets. The performance targets were higher this year than in 2007-08. West Hartford did not make AYP this year because of subgroup performance in both reading and math on both the CMT and the CAPT and is identified as a District in Need of Improvement – Year 5, which requires us to update the District Improvement Plan developed 2 years ago and to distribute an NCLB letter to all parents. Conard, Smith, and Sedgwick did not make AYP for 1 year, and no action is required of them. Hall is in Year 2 and King Philip is in Year 6 of needing improvement, and both schools will have to update their school improvement plans and submit them for board approval. Across the state, about 41% of schools did not make AYP, including 30 schools in DRGs A and B. For the complete AYP report go to <http://www.whps.org/board/agenda-documents/20090915/AYP%20results%20Sep%2015,%202009.pdf>.

For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2009, the district had a budget surplus of \$377,231 (.3%), which was returned to the town. This was achieved despite the necessity of setting up a \$529,500 contingent liability in the Transportation account due to a dispute with the bus company regarding the liquidated damages we assessed them for non-performance during the 2008-09 school year. This liability was offset by a reduction in the pre-funding of electricity expenses for 2009-10 from a surplus in that account for 2008-09. To see the Financial Report go to <http://www.whps.org/board/agenda-documents/20090915/Financial%20Report%20-%20June%2030,%202009.pdf>.

The next board meeting will take place October 6, 2009, at 7:00 pm in room 314 at Town Hall.

Observer name: Kathy Wilson