

## LWV OBSERVER REPORT FORM

*Board or Commission: West Hartford Board of Education*

*Date of Meeting: December 1, 2009*

*Members present: All (Bruce Putterman via speakerphone)*

*Nature of meeting Routine X*

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

*Called to order (time): 7:02 pm*

*Adjourned (time): 9:29 pm*

*Action taken:*

The main items on the agenda were a report on the newly released Strategic School Profiles and an update on the District Improvement Plan.

Prior to these reports, Dr. Karen List offered her Superintendent's Report. She announced that absences are now low enough that they will no longer be posted, but will be posted again should they rise above 5%. Hall Senior Projects were highlighted in a recent Hartford Courant article, <http://www.courant.com/community/hartford/hc-west-hartford-hall-tas-1125.artnov24,0,4524424.story>, specifically those undertaken by students interested in teaching. Dr. List noted that these projects are similar to those included in the state's secondary school reform proposals, whose implementation has been sidelined by budget constraints. She also reported that Wolcott School won the district's second November Conservation Challenge, reducing its electricity consumption for the month by 32% versus November, 2008. Overall, the district reduced its consumption by 9.77% and saved over \$14,000.

Assistant Superintendent Eileen Howley and Director of Finance and Planning Chip Ward reported on the recently published 2008-09 Strategic School Profiles, of which there is one for each school and an overall profile for the district. These annual reports present data in a standardized format based on information the district provides to the state and on results of standardized state tests. Each report is split into four sections: Needs, Resources, Processes, and Student Performance. For the first time this year, certain data from the Profiles were placed in the context of Board Goals relevant to that data, specifically high school graduation rates, diversity in athletics and performing arts groups, and preschool attendance. The Conard class of 2009 fell below the board's target 95% graduation rate with 92.8%, while Hall exceeded it at 97.8%. Both schools' rates were higher for 2009 than 2008. With respect to diversity in athletics and performance groups, all of West Hartford's schools report persistent gaps in participation between white and minority students, with only slight and sporadic improvement over time – except at Bristow Middle School, which in 2009 came close to erasing its gap in music participation. Preschool attendance among entering kindergartners has been rising for the last four years and, at 90.3% in 2009, exceeded the board goal of 90%. Information in the Profiles regarding student performance on standardized tests had been discussed in relation to board goals at previous meetings and was not addressed at this one. The complete report may be viewed at <http://www.whps.org/board/agenda-documents/20091201/Strategic%20School%20Profiles%20December%201%20mtg.pdf>. The Profiles themselves are normally posted on the State Department of Education website, but are not there as of this writing.

Dr. Howley, Mr. Ward, Director of Teaching and Assessment Sally Alubicki, and Administrator for District Improvement Donna Nestler-Rusack presented the update on the District Improvement Plan (DIP), which was approved by the board in January, 2008, and subsequently approved by the State Department of Education. The district is required to update the DIP based on new state requirements and on the results of our students' performance on state standardized tests. The initiatives undertaken through the DIP, while targeted to specific subgroups identified as in need of improvement, represent best practices applicable to all students across the district and are being implemented in all schools. The DIP has three primary goals: increasing reading proficiency for underperforming students, increasing math proficiency for underperforming students, and ensuring that parents are actively engaged in the educational process. These goals are being addressed through several key areas:

- Priority Standards – what students need to know and be able to do. Over the past year priority standards have been developed K-10 for math and reading, additionally at the secondary level for science and social studies. Other departments, such as guidance, health, etc., have begun to develop priority standards.
- Effective Teaching Strategies - ten research-based instructional strategies that have been shown to have the greatest impact on student achievement. All staff have received training in the use of these strategies and they are being incorporated in lesson plans by teachers at all levels. They are currently being modified and refined based on student results, and have been incorporated into the curriculum review process. Special focus has been placed on training and implementation of effective teaching strategies for English Language Learners.
- Data Teams/Data Driven Decision Making – the ongoing collaborative use of student performance data to identify strengths and weaknesses and to determine effective strategies for improving learning. Staff have received training on data teams and the process is being implemented at grade-level meetings at the elementary schools and at the department level in the secondary schools. A new data warehousing system to support data driven decision making called Inform has been selected and is being implemented.
- Common Formative Assessments – tests based on priority standards and administered by all teachers at a grade level or for the same course. They have been developed and are being used at all levels, for example quarterly in each core academic area at the secondary schools, and will be used to inform instruction and curriculum decisions. Common mid-terms and finals are being developed at the high schools.
- Parent Engagement – monitoring and reviewing school-based parental involvement programs. Work in this area begins this year.
- School Improvement Plans – building-level plans based on school and individual data, informed by overall district plans. Each school's plan has been revised or reinforced based on the most recent CMT and CAPT data. All plans are available at <http://www.whps.org/whps/primary.resources/pubilcations>.

Scientific Research Based Interventions (SRBI), Connecticut's version of the nationally recognized Response to Intervention (RTI) model, promotes instructional and social-emotional/behavioral supports for students through interventions that are research-based. It involves a continuum of educational opportunities for all students and has become a part of West Hartford's district improvement plan because its processes dovetail with ours for targeting students who need instructional interventions to be successful. The first step in implementing

SRBI is choosing a set of universal tests that form the basis for intervention by measuring student achievement in basic skills over time, and the district has chosen AIMSweb, which provides short tests and software for tracking student progress. Training began in August and the system is being piloted throughout the elementary schools, with full implementation expected in the 2010-11 school year. Secondary math and English departments are in the process of identifying assessments that can be universally administered there.

As part of SRBI, the district has also revised its Student Assistance Teams process, which assists teachers in identifying and providing intervention for students. It has been renamed Student Success Teams and brought into closer alignment with the SRBI standards for data analysis and progress monitoring. Staff training in the revised process will begin in January, 2010, and a model Individual Performance Plan (IPP) will be piloted at the same time. A district SRBI Council has also been established.

Mr. Ward provided information on progress toward Board Goals related to the DIP, specifically those involving safe schools and parent and community engagement. The district has not met its goal that 90% of parents and teachers responding to a survey will indicate that schools are safe and orderly and students are well-behaved. High School parents and teachers expressed the most dissatisfaction with this aspect of the schools, especially with respect to bullying and student substance abuse. Partially unmet is the goal that the percentage of students in grades 5 –12 responding to a survey indicating that schools are safe and orderly and students are well behaved will increase by 5% per year. Secondary students' perceptions improved substantially, while grade 5 students' perceptions were up only slightly, though these students were significantly more satisfied. Students at all levels expressed high rates of concern regarding bullying, and 54% of high school students feel that substance abuse is a problem. The district exceeded its goals for parents attending teacher conferences and came close to meeting the goal for creating a welcoming environment.

The full report on the DIP is available at <http://www.whps.org/board/agenda-documents/20091201/DIPboardreport120109withListedits%202007%20version%20final.pdf>.

The next board meeting will take place December 15, 2009, at 7:00 pm in room 314 at Town Hall.

*Observer name: Kathy Wilson*