

LWV OBSERVER REPORT FORM

Board or Commission: West Hartford Board of Education

Date of Meeting: January 5, 2010

Members present: All but Clare Kindall, Bruce Putterman present via speakerphone

Routine X

Special

Called to order (time): 7:05 pm

Adjourned (time): 9:38 pm

Action taken:

The main items on the agenda were ratification of the school security officers' contract, a memorandum of understanding in support of the federal Race to the Top Grant, an update on Charter Oak's International Baccalaureate program, and a report on elementary reading and language arts.

The board unanimously ratified the security officers' 4-year contract, which freezes wages in its first year, reduces health insurance benefits, changes the pension plan for new hires to a defined contribution plan versus the defined benefit plan for current members, and eliminates payment for accumulated unused sick leave upon retirement for new hires. A more detailed summary of the contract may be viewed at <http://www.whps.org/board/agenda-documents/20100105/Ratification%20of%20Security%20Contract.pdf>.

The board also approved unanimously the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in support of the State Department of Education's application for the federal Race to the Top Grant. The Race to the Top (RTTT) grant is a competitive federal grant carved out of the federal stimulus bill and designed to improve public education through nationwide standards and assessments, better data systems to support instruction, higher quality teaching and leadership, and turning around the lowest achieving schools. Connecticut is applying for \$175 million, of which West Hartford might receive \$170,000 per year over the 4-year life of the grant. The Memorandum of Understanding represents preliminary approval for West Hartford to participate in the program, which will require us to implement all or significant portions of the state's RTTT plan, but we can opt out within 90 days after the grant is awarded. The majority of the state's plan is in line with what we are already doing or plan to do, except at the high schools where we may need to hire additional teachers to meet the plan's 4-year math requirement. A draft of the state's plan is available at <http://racetothetopct.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/descriptors-for-rttt-options-dec20-3.pdf>.

The progress report on Charter Oak's International Baccalaureate Program was presented by Principal Mary Thompson, IB Coordinator Cheri Burke, and 5th grade teachers Adrienne Guara and Jen Dolan. They provided a refresher on what the IB Primary Years program is, an overview of what has been done and is being planned, and how the program affects students and teachers in the classroom. An IB consultant visited the school in November and staff are currently involved in building the school's program and writing its application for authorization, which is due June 1. An authorization visit from IB staff will take place in the fall or early winter of this year, and authorization is hoped for in the spring of 2011. In keeping with its new program, Charter Oak has been renamed Charter Oak International School. For more

information on the IB program at Charter Oak, see <http://www.whps.org/board/agenda-documents/20100105/IB%20Charter%20Oak.pdf>.

Assistant Superintendent Eileen Howley and Director of Teaching and Assessment Sally Alubicki reported on elementary reading and language arts. They provided an overview of the reading program, which is based on a balanced literacy approach and includes the teaching of phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. In support of this program, new texts have been purchased and are in place in 75% of our elementary classrooms with a goal of full implementation over the next 3 years. They also outlined the staff positions in place to provide support for students having difficulty learning to read and indicated that measurable progress has been made in decreasing the percentage of students reading below grade level. After determining that the longstanding D'Nealian method of teaching handwriting is flawed, the district implemented a new handwriting program this fall, and the spelling curriculum will be aligned with the new reading program, which integrates the teaching of spelling as part of the literacy process. For more information go to <http://www.whps.org/board/agenda-documents/20100105/Reading%20BOE%20January%205,%202010.pdf>.

In her superintendent's report, Karen List indicated that the district will be looking at what happens to Charter Oak IB students in middle and high school and exploring the possibility of implementing the program at the secondary level. She also reported that there will be a Family Forum on Teen Internet Safety at Conard on January 20. January is also National Mentor Month, and the district hopes to attract 30 new mentors over the course of the month. The district has completed a Home Language survey of students, and Dr. List reported that 66 different languages are spoken in students' homes, the most common being Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Portuguese, and Russian.

The board will hold a workshop on January 11 from 5:30 to 8:00 pm in Town Hall room 400 on the topic Mission and Beliefs. Its next regular meeting will take place January 19 at 7:00 pm in room 314 at Town Hall.

Observer name: Kathy Wilson