

## LWV OBSERVER REPORT FORM

*Board or Commission: West Hartford Board of Education*

*Date of Meeting: February 25, 2010*

*Members present: All but Bruce Putterman*

*Nature of meeting Routine   X*

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

*Called to order (time): 7:01 p.m.*

*Adjourned (time): 8:48 p.m.*

### *Action taken:*

The main items on the agenda were an appointment to the Risk Management Advisory Board, the first reading of calendar options for the 2011-12 school year, a report on West Hartford's status under the state racial imbalance law, and a personnel report on minority recruitment.

The board approved 6-0 the appointment of Robert Sisk as a Board Representative to the Risk Management Advisory Board for the period December 2009 through December 2012. Mr. Sisk has private sector experience in investment and benefits management and is well-known in town as the author of a report on the sustainability of West Hartford's fiscal and benefits policies. That report may be viewed at <http://www.whta.org/SiskTOWHBudget040209.pdf>.

The board voted 6-0 to accept as a first reading four calendar options for the 2011-12 school year. The variables among the four are pre- and post-Labor Day starts and the length of February break. The options may be viewed at <http://www.whps.org/board/agenda-documents/20100225/2011-2012%20final%20large%20calendars.pdf> and parents are asked to respond to a survey on them at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/ZQX72TT>.

Assistant Corporation Counsel Kimberly Boneham provided the Board with background on the state racial imbalance law and West Hartford's current status under it. The racial imbalance statute was enacted in 1969 and deals with student demographics within a town. By contrast, the Sheff v. O'Neill case dealt with demographics among towns, specifically Hartford and its surrounding suburbs. It designates a school as out of balance if its percentage of minority students differs by more than 25 points, plus or minus, from the percentage of minority students in the district as a whole. If imbalance is found, the district has 120 days to submit a plan to address the situation, and the state then has 60 days to review and approve/disapprove it. If the plan is disapproved, the district may appeal to the Commissioner of Education, to the state board of Education, and then to the courts. Currently in West Hartford, Charter Oak and Smith schools are out of balance and Duffy is close. However, Charter Oak and Smith are exempt from racial balance compliance because they are designated as "Unique Schools."

Unique Schools are defined as intradistrict magnets offering distinct programs and/or voluntary enrollment. Charter Oak and Smith have been designated as Unique since 2000 on the basis of voluntary enrollment and, though that status has no definite expiration date, they are reviewed annually for progress toward balanced enrollment. Progress has not been made, and in 2006 the state expressed concern, asked for a new plan, and then-Commissioner Sternberg stated that she was considering revoking their Unique status. In response, West Hartford asked for clarification of the definition of "Unique School." In April, 2009, current commissioner McQuillan asked for

a new report on West Hartford's racial balance efforts, which the town supplied. The state has taken no further action since, and there is nothing in the correspondence between it and the district indicating that it is considering revoking either school's Unique status. If either school were to lose Unique status, which the Commissioner can revoke at any time, the district would need to submit yet another plan to address its racial imbalance. If that plan were rejected, the district could appeal to the state Board of Education and then to the courts.

Executive Director of Human Resources Rick Ledwith's update on the district's minority recruitment action plan may be viewed at <http://www.whps.org/board/agenda-documents/20100225/minority%20recruitment%20action%20plan%20minus%20personnel%20report.pdf>. The district's goal is to have the percentage of minority teaching staff more closely reflect that of our student population. Currently West Hartford's 5.5% minority teacher percentage is less than both the state's 7% and the nation's 9%. It is also dramatically less than our 36% student minority percentage. A diverse teaching staff is believed to help close the achievement gap, better provide role models, enrich the learning environment, and provide minority students with "cultural brokers" that aid them in navigating the school environment. West Hartford's plan to recruit more minority teachers includes a partnership with CREC, support of the Alternate Route to Certification program, encouraging our own students to pursue teaching, developing teachers from current non-certified staff, and recruiting applicants from teacher preparation colleges in states with teaching surpluses and from historically black colleges and universities.

The next regular Board meeting will take place March 2 and will feature the superintendent's budget presentation. The board will hold budget workshops on March 10 and 11, plus a final one on March 25 following a public hearing on the budget. All begin at 7:00 p.m. in room 314 at Town Hall.

*Observer name: Kathy Wilson*