

LWV OBSERVER REPORT FORM

Board or Commission: West Hartford Board of Education

Date of Meeting: June 15, 2010

Members present: All

Nature of meeting Routine X

Special _____

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

Adjourned (time): 9:25 p.m.

Action taken:

The main items on the agenda were approval of three board policies, a grant application by the Adult Education program, appointment of the new Bugbee School principal, and a progress report on Scientific Research Based Interventions.

The board unanimously approved as a second reading new Board Policy 4090–Employee Use of Technology (see <http://www.whps.org/board/agenda-documents/20100615/4090--P-Employee%20Use%20of%20Technology.pdf>), but referred new Board Policy 4080–Public Communications by Employees (see <http://www.whps.org/board/agenda-documents/20100615/4080--P-Public%20Communications%20by%20Employees.pdf>) back to the Policy Sub-Committee based on new legal advice and proposed new language based on First Amendment concerns.

By a vote of 5-2, with Clare Kindall and Diane Mudge voting against, the board approved as amended the second and final reading of revised Board Policy 1251–School-Age Child Care. Debate centered on the fact that accreditation for after-school providers is not currently available. Ms. Kindall and Ms. Mudge expressed uneasiness about leaving language in the policy requiring accreditation, feeling that such a requirement is meaningless if it cannot be fulfilled. Supporters felt that, because the policy as amended also provides two alternatives to accreditation (a district-approved self-study option or a waiver from the Assistant Superintendent), leaving in the requirement renders the policy both workable now and more flexible for the future, should accreditation become available. Text of the policy prior to amendment may be viewed at <http://www.whps.org/board/agenda-documents/20100615/1251-P-School-Age%20Child%20Care.pdf>.

The board unanimously approved an application by the Adult Education program to the CT State Department of Education for a Program Improvement Project grant in the area of family literacy. The project being proposed is an extension of an ongoing cooperative effort between the Adult Education program and the Family Resource Center at Charter Oak. It would expand evening ESOL classes for parents, currently offered only at Webster Hill, to Charter Oak next year.

In her Superintendent’s Report, Karen List announced that Conard has been ranked the #2 high school in Connecticut by Newsweek Magazine. Hall is #10. The rankings are based solely on AP participation. Dr. List also reported that the Charter Oak pre-school program has received accreditation; the program at Smith already has it.

Noam Sturm, currently Assistant Principal at Smith, has been appointed Principal at Bugbee. He replaces Peg Beecher, who is retiring. Mr. Sturm began his career in West Hartford as a teacher at Aiken, has served as coordinator of the ESOL summer program, and was a curriculum specialist at Whiting Lane before assuming his position at Smith. He is one of several recent appointees who have come through the district's Leadership Academy, designed to groom teachers for advancement to administrative positions.

Assistant Superintendent for Instruction and Curriculum Eileen Howley led a team reporting progress in the implementation of Scientific Research Based Intervention (SRBI) in the district. SRBI is the new State Department of Education-mandated model for providing early, ongoing support to students with academic and/or behavioral difficulties. It involves a tiered approach, beginning in the regular classroom, escalating to more separate and intensive intervention as needed, and is designed to catch and remediate problems quickly and effectively. It replaces the old, discrepancy-based model for identifying learning disabilities, commonly dubbed "wait-to-fail."

During 2008-09, the district analyzed all aspects of the SRBI model, and in 2009-10 began piloting at Aiken and Webster Hill the use of universal assessments to track student progress, the effectiveness of instruction, and the adequacy of core curriculum. Universal assessments are quick probes designed to detect a learning problem and are administered three times a year. During 2009-10, the district also piloted the AIMSweb program, which provides assessments and progress monitoring capabilities; AIMSweb will begin district-wide implementation in 2010-11. At the secondary level, the math and English departments are in the process of identifying assessments to be used as universal screenings.

In support of SRBI, the district has revamped Student Assistance Teams, renaming them Student Success Teams and piloting them at the elementary level in 2009-10. These teams assist classroom teachers in helping students and provide additional intervention, if needed, based on individual student needs. At the secondary level, training in the new team process has begun, with an emphasis on literacy; math and behavioral interventions will be added in 2010-11.

As for results so far, with CMT scores not yet available for this year Principals Kathleen McKay of Aiken and Jeff Wallowitz of Webster Hill were able to offer little hard data. They did state, however, that SRBI has reduced both behavioral problems and special ed referrals at their schools.

In his Personnel Report, Director of Human Resources Rick Ledwith reported that 16 staff members have announced plans to retire, versus 7 in 2009. Turnover is expected to come in at about 3 ½%, much lower than the usual 10% to 11%. He also said that the district has two openings for administrators, the Assistant Principalships at Smith and Charter Oak, which it hopes to fill by mid-July. Recruiting for the second Leadership Academy is also underway.

The next board meeting will take place September 7 at 7:00 p.m. in room 314 at Town Hall.

Observer name: Kathy Wilson