

LWV OBSERVER REPORT FORM

Board or Commission: West Hartford Board of Education

Date of Meeting: January 19, 2010

Members present: All (Terry Schmitt via speakerphone)

Nature of meeting Routine X *Special* _____

Called to order (time): 7:05 pm *Adjourned (time): 9:18 pm*

Action taken:

The main items on the agenda were ratification of the school nurses contract, a “state of the schools” report, and presentation of the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for 2010-11 and 2011-12.

The board ratified unanimously the contract between the Board of Education and the West Hartford Public Schools Nurses Association for the period July 1, 2010 through June 30, 2013. Highlights of the contract include a wage freeze for 2010-11, a 2% combined wage/step increase for 2011-12, and a 3% combined increase for 2012-13. The new benefit plan increases employee health care contributions and co-pays as well as pension contributions. For new-hires, the pension plan changes from a defined benefit to a defined contribution plan and accumulated unused sick time can no longer be cashed in at retirement. Similar provisions were negotiated with school security personnel, whose contract was ratified at the last board meeting. The defined contribution plan is expected to significantly reduce the district’s pension costs over time. Current costs are running at 17%-18% of covered payroll, while the new plan will cost a maximum of 6%. See <http://www.whps.org/board/agenda-documents/20100119/Ratification%20of%20nurses%20Contract.pdf> for more details on the contract.

In her Superintendent’s Report, Karen List announced a Community of Concern panel discussion on teen and tween substance abuse and social pressure to be held February 26 at 7:00 pm at Conard High School. She also reported that Charter Oak has received a \$990 grant that it is using to create a better cafeteria eating environment and that two teachers from China are currently visiting the district for two weeks. Dr. List then delivered her State of the Schools report, which, by way of background to this year’s budget process, sought to provide a historical perspective on education in West Hartford, a statistical comparison of where we are today versus ten years ago, and a vision of where we will be ten years from now.

Dr. Tracey Wilson, Town Historian and Conard social studies teacher, narrated a history of West Hartford education beginning in 1869 when there were 9 school districts in town, each with its own one-room schoolhouse and separate tax levy. One of these still stands at the intersection of Mountain and Buena Vista Roads. William H. Hall, for whom the high school is named, consolidated the district in the 1880’s, and the population nearly doubled during the 1890’s when West Hartford first began to assume its current suburban character. Further massive growth took place in the 1920’s and ‘50’s, with the number of schools peaking at 23 by 1960, followed by contraction and closings in the 1970’s and ‘80’s. The only new school built since 1970 is Bristow Middle School, completed in 2006. The configuration of the schools changed over time

also, from the early one-room structures, to larger buildings offering separate classrooms for grades K to 8 (high school was originally available only in Hartford), to the addition of a local high school (Hall in 1924) and separate junior high schools, and finally to the current elementary/middle/high school arrangement. The board of education offices were originally housed in the Old East School on Whiting Lane, in the old St. Agnes Home on Steele Road from 1973 to 1987, in the former town hall on Main Street from 1987 to 2007, and since then in Town Hall.

Dr. List provided a statistical comparison of the district in the current 2009-10 school year to 1999-2000. The decade has seen 11% growth in enrollment, as well as enormous demographic changes in the student body. The percentage of minority students has increased from 27% to 36%; the percentage qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch has risen from 14% to 17%; the number of languages spoken at home has risen from 52 to 66. Meanwhile, test scores have also risen-- +3% on the CMT, +16% on the CAPT—and AP participation has increased dramatically. Costs are also up, however, with wages tracking a bit higher than the CPI and benefits costs significantly outpacing inflation. She then outlined a vision for the schools in 2020 encompassing a well-maintained physical plant, resources allocated according to a coherent plan of continuous scholastic improvement, teaching based on best practices and priority standards, and well-rounded students who are prepared for active civic, economic, and cultural participation in the world of the 21st century.

To see the full State of the Schools Power Point presentation, go to http://www.whps.org/board/agenda-documents/20100119/January%2019%20Board%20presentation_files/frame.htm.

The 12-year CIP presented to the board focuses primarily on maintenance projects—boilers, roofs, and masonry repairs. It totals \$2.8 million for 2010-11 and \$3.5 million for 2011-12, versus \$2.3 million for 2009-10. The board will vote on the CIP at its next meeting. Please see <http://www.whps.org/board/agenda-documents/20100119/CIP%20Staff%20Report%20-%202010-11.pdf> for the complete presentation.

The next regular board meeting will take place February 2 at 7:00 pm in room 314 at Town Hall.

Observer name: Kathy Wilson