

2009 Voters Guide



The League of Women Voters of Greater Hartford

www.lwvgh.org

Responses by question:

1. How would you address the state mandate for our West Hartford schools to be more racially balanced?

Andrew Bannon-Guasp

The Racial Imbalance Law is a statute that would have us treat children differently based on race. The Board of Education has failed to live up to its moral obligation to do what is in the best interest of our students, their parents and the taxpayers. The board should retain legal counsel and mount a challenge to this statute, and do so as soon as possible

I've read dozens of pages of correspondence between our Superintendent and the State of CT on this issue that were obtained through a request filed under the Freedom of Information Act. I am outraged by references made by our own administration to our schools having "*too many minority students.*" Plans (never publicly voted on) to "encourage" *neighborhood students to attend schools in other parts of the district*, and statements like "*once we get these students away from the neighborhood*" ought to raise a red flag for those of us who view our neighborhood school system as the life-blood of our town.

Equally troubling are the board's intentions to fully reveal the details of their plan to comply with this statute after the election. How convenient.

This board has been operating in the shadows on this issue, and has abdicated their moral and legal responsibilities. It is time to finally do the right thing for our children and challenge this statute. That is exactly what I would proudly - and publicly - vote to do.

Ellen Burchill Brassil

The state has rejected voluntary measures and is bearing down on West Hartford to heed a statute that would move children to schools beyond their neighborhoods based solely on race. This must stop. West Hartford is a shining example of a wonderfully diverse model school district. When the issue erupted back in 1994, the democrats responded with the controversial "K-2/3-5" plan. That scheme (overturned following a citizen uprising) would have completely dismantled our neighborhood school system. The board back then voted to redistrict every child by placing them on buses for half of their elementary school years even though that plan lacked educational benefit and would have spent money moving children around rather than addressing authentic educational needs.

The democrats' record on this issue would treat children differently based on the color of their skin. Recent, startling correspondence between the State and our district has surfaced and refers to "too many" minority students at Charter Oak and Smith, and "too many" white students at Bugbee, Duffy, and Morley. Those letters include specific

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statements on how our board and administration plan to comply with this offensive statute, even though plans were submitted without public debate or a board vote.

During my years on the board, I consistently supported local control, neighborhood schools, and student achievement. Sadly, the current board leadership has concerned itself with social re-engineering, sleep patterns, and what should be allowed in school vending machines.

It's time to put education first, reaffirm our commitment to neighborhood schools and do what is right for children. Challenging this oppressive statute would be a good start.

Elin Katz

Don't mess with success. We have great neighborhood schools that reflect the communities which support them. I will promote diversity in our schools and compliance with applicable law, but without disrupting our neighborhood schools. Of course we must respond to the Department of Education's concerns, but I believe that conversation should focus on our continuing ability to meet the educational needs of a diverse and vibrant student body in each of our schools, not on arbitrary formulas concerning racial composition.

Clare Kindall

Only Charter Oak and Smith are affected by the State Department of Education's inquiry, and both schools are voluntary magnet schools - any neighborhood student at either school may attend another West Hartford school, and magnet students by definition attend voluntarily. Their voluntary enrollment historically has afforded them special status under the state law, which should continue.

As a community, we need to support all of our students. The best way to accomplish this is to maintain our high-quality neighborhood schools, to focus on student achievement, and to address each child's needs, rather than to fixate on racial demographics.

Naogan Ma

I understand the need to racially balance our schools. I must also stress the crucial element of parental investment in their children's education. Parents spend a lot of money for their children's higher education. Parents should also have choices when their children are ready for elementary school. State Mandate allows us to be more proactive in our effort to promote a racially diverse learning environment. Our goal should be focus on building high quality neighborhood schools, not disrupting them. Only Charter Oak and Smith are affected by the State Mandate, and both schools are voluntary magnet schools. They are building a community, we must support our community.

Lib Spinella

As a life-long resident and member of the school board, I have a genuine appreciation for our neighborhood school system-and the will and desire to fight to maintain it. I also remember the turmoil a democrat board inflicted on our town a decade ago when they voted to eliminate neighborhood schools, and to invalidate decisions parents made regarding where their families would live and which elementary school their children would attend.

The racial imbalance statute is outdated and singles out/ punishes those towns that have a diverse student population. To suggest, as this law does, that West Hartford can have an

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elementary minority population of nearly 40% and at the same time be racially isolated while ignoring West Hartford's natural diversity is ludicrous. The board has an obligation to retain qualified legal counsel and challenge this statute that goes after West Hartford.

Despite their repeated failures to do so, the board majority continues to ask the state to believe they can be successful in convincing parents to have their children leave their neighborhood schools and waste time (and money) on school buses to go to another school in the district. This board majority needs to acknowledge that most parents and children are happy with their neighborhood schools, whether that neighborhood is Charter Oak, Smith, Bugbee, Duffy, Morley or any other.

Regrettably, the current board leadership has chosen to keep the public in the dark concerning exactly how they plan to respond to the state mandate. Postponing public discussion until after the municipal elections is a disservice to the community and shows disdain for the very people the board was elected to serve. West Hartford and our children deserve better.