

West Hartford Public Schools  
Board of Education  
Regular Board Meeting  
**September 5, 2023**

Present: Mr. Goldman, Dr. Harris, Dr. Kamauf, Mr. Paul Vicinus, Superintendent,  
Ms. Naseralla, Dr. Steinberg, Dr. Thomas-Farquharson, Student Representative  
Liam Wright and Student Representative Kris Rimal

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm.

*Roll Call/Pledge of  
Allegiance*

There was no revision to the agenda order.

*Revision to the agenda order*

Dr. Thomas-Farquharson shared the following statement. “The Board has been made aware of an allegation of a racial slur uttered in the presence of students. We would like the community to know that the Board of Education and the district administration take these matters seriously and remain committed to our vision to value and honor all in our community. The district administration is investigating thoroughly. I want to express that although we have done extensive training to create school environments that are inclusive and equity driven, we know that our work is never done. The defining factor for our district and our community lies within how we respond, how we come together to ensure our students feel safe, valued, and seen for who they are.”

*Public Communication*

Ellen Nichols, West Hartford, spoke on the curriculum.

Attie Lordon, West Hartford, spoke on before and after school childcare options.

Anita Arakelian, West Hartford, spoke on school finances.

Kim Hughes, West Hartford, spoke about a climate event.

Amy Fichman, West Hartford, spoke about concerns at Sedgwick.

Lizzy Brooks, West Hartford, spoke about school enrichment.

Mark Greenstein, West Hartford, spoke about finance and school choice.

*Non-Staff Communications  
and Reports*

Hall High School student representative, Liam Wright, reported on freshman orientation and club activities. A breakfast was also held. Football, soccer, and women’s field hockey have been practicing and the men’s golf team has started to play matches. Work on the tennis courts has been completed.

Conard High School student representative, Kris Rimal, reported on freshman orientation and club activities which was the largest turnout that Conard has had in

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the past few years. Football, soccer, and women's field hockey have been practicing. The boys golf team had their first match and cross country is having their season opening meet in Middletown at the end of the week. The tennis courts have been repainted.

There was no unfinished business.

Dr. Kamouf moved and Mrs. Nesoralla seconded:

THAT the Board of Education appoint Ms. LaToya Fernandez as a member of the West Hartford Board of Education to fill the position vacated by Dr. Jason Chang through November, 2023, and that Mr. Leon Dadoff swear in Ms. LaToya Fernandez as a new Board member.

Discussion took place regarding the appointment of Ms. Latoya Fernandez as a member of the West Hartford Board of Education.

Mr. Goldman, abstained; Dr. Harris, abstained; Dr. Kamouf, yes; Ms. Nesoralla, yes; Dr. Steinberg, yes; Dr. Thomas-Farquharson, yes

Motion passed.

Dr. Steinberg moved and Dr. Kamouf seconded:

THAT the Board of Education appoint Mrs. Nesoralla as Secretary of the Board.

Motion passed.

Mr. Paul Vicinus, Superintendent, welcomed student representatives Liam Wright and Kris Rimal to the Board of Education. Mr. Vicinus reported on the following:

- Mr. Vincinus thanked the Human Resources Department for their work, the teachers who volunteered their time this summer to serve on interview committees and the custodial staff and Plant Services for their work to get the schools ready.
- Over 9,300 students entered school on the first day.
- Mr. Vicinus reiterated West Hartford Public School's mission to prepare and inspire all students. There is a focus on every child every day in the district. We need to ensure that we are creating the conditions for learning for every child by creating a welcoming environment in which our students feel a genuine sense of belonging and that we need to do so every day. We know that there are challenges that are out there. We are seeing chronic absenteeism

*Unfinished business*

*New Business*

*Staff Communications and  
Reports  
Superintendent's Report*

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across the state and we need to do our part to ensure that every single day we are setting the conditions to help students to learn. Equity has always been a focus in the district.

- Mr. Vicinus spoke about Mr. Ken Williams, former principal and author.
- Hall High School went through its accreditation with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges and they were awarded continued accreditation. Conard High School will receive its accreditation visit early this December.
- Mr. Vicinus welcomed Ms. Theresa Rangel, Executive Director of Equity Advancement, to the Executive Team.
- Mr. Vincinus recognized pre-K through Grade 12 as US News and World Report announced that Conard placed number 10 and Hall placed number 11 on the annual placement of the state and national rankings. Both schools moved up from the previous year in the top 5% of schools in the State and the top 3% of schools nationally.
- Sean Passan, King Philip Social Studies Teacher and a former Board of Education member for being selected for the Mohegan Tribe Challenge Grant. It is a program designed to support the teaching of Native American history tradition and cultures.
- Charter Oak International Academy was recognized as the recipient of the Center for Bridging Cultures Cross Cultural Chinese Language Education Grant in the amount of \$10,000.

Mr. Paul Vicinus, Superintendent; Dr. Andrew Morrow, Assistant Superintendent for Administration; Ms. Anne McKernan, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Ms. Theresa Rangel, Executive Director of Equity Advancement; Ms. Melissa Caballero, Director of Pupil Services; Mr. Julio Duarte, Executive Director of Human Resources, and Elizabeth Hewitt, Director of Budget and Finance gave a report on the 2023-2024 opening of school.

Dr. Morrow gave an update on Plant and Facilities projects that took place over the summer months. This included capital improvement projects, smaller improvement projects, and routine maintenance and cleaning. Dr. Morrow also gave an Information Technology update. This included securing \$412,677 in E-Rate grants to partially fund the proactive replacement of all 1,000 wireless access points district-wide. The cost optimization and efficiency improvement of migrating the mobile device management platforms, resulted in a \$40,000 savings. The district's internet speed was upgraded from 2 gigabit to 10 gigabit. Dr. Morrow also spoke on the streamlining processes through technology for West Hartford Public Schools and infrastructure upgrades and facilities enhancement. For transportation, West Hartford Public Schools expects to transport 5,196 students on 95 buses with 213 runs. The buses

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have a digital video/audio monitoring system, a child check system, a global positioning system and each minibus has a minimum of eight positions each of permanently installed 5-point integrated care seats. Coming later in the Fall will be first view bus tracking.

Questions included what projects did not get completed, an update on air conditioning and modular classrooms.

Ms. McKernan gave an update on the district's strategic planning effort, curriculum writing projects, summer programs, summer professional learning opportunities, and school activities. Ms. McKernan reviewed the district and school strategic plans. In the Summer Connections program, 217 students participated including students from all eleven elementary schools and Open Choice. In the ESOL Summer School program, approximately 200 students participated. Adult learning proficiency classes also took place. In the HANOC Program, 17 students in grades one through five participated for four weeks. In the Middle School Summer Program, 80 students participated during the four-week program. In the High School Summer Program, approximately 600 students attended both in-person and in online learning. Over 90 students attended the Summer Jazz Jam program. The Secondary Transition and Orientation Programs were also held. Curriculum writing took place over the summer months. Several teachers attended Advanced Placement training. Ms. Jackie Coricelli, WHPS Computer Science Curriculum Specialist, supported professional learning sessions for the social studies team. The three middle schools convened as a team of building leaders and teachers to review their experience from the first year of implementation of the School Based Diversion Initiative.

Questions from the Board included the HANOC program versus the Summer School program, the increase in the middle school summer program, electives at the high school level.

Ms. Rangel gave an update on the professional learning that took place. A team of educators from across all grade levels and with a cross-section of affiliations with the Equity and Diversity Council, the School-Based Diversion Initiative and the LGBTQ Alliance assembled to develop materials and resources for assured professional learning experiences for staff. Ms. Rangel explained restorative practices. She also spoke about convocation and speaker Kenneth Wilisams, former principal and author of several texts including Ruthless Equity.

Ms. Melissa Caballero gave a report on Pupil Services. Ms. Caballero spoke about the District Annual Performance Report and Determinations. The district received the highest determination level of "Meets Requirements" based on the 2020-2021 school

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year data. The district met targets in the proficiency rate on graduation rates, time with nondisabled peers, disproportionality, post secondary transition, general supervision, timely and accurate State reporting and chronic absenteeism. There are increased graduation rates from 72.3% in 2019-2020 to 92.0% in the 2020-2021 school year. Ms. Caballero reported on the Extended School Year Services for 2023. A total of 347 students from pre-k through the post-secondary program participated through separate programs: Early Learning, Elementary, Middle and High School and Post Secondary for over four weeks.

There are 1,702 students eligible for special education with an Individualized Education Plan registered in WHPS. There was a 16.9% prevalence rate of students with disabilities as of May 2023 in WHPS. The department hired 25 new certified and professional staff to replace teachers and related service providers who have retired, who took a leave of absence or have left the district.

The State has adopted a new Individualized Education Program (IEP) and Special Education Data System (CT-SEDS). This offers a restructured IEP and user-friendly parent portal. New legislature passed regarding the age of eligibility for special education. Students were eligible for special education until they turned 21 and the age now is 22. Ms. Caballero also reviewed the pupil services department priorities which includes monitoring and assessing district data and eligibility compliance with Federal and State regulations for Individual with Disabilities Education Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act 504 with a focus on disproportionality. Also to continue implementation of standard-based Individualized Education Plans with the Common Core State Standards with a focus on educational benefit and progress monitoring through Quality IEP Writing and on the CT-SEDS platform.

Questions from the Board included the eligibility age for kindergarten and new date of entering Kindergarten.

Mr. Julio Duarte gave an update on recruitment, hiring and retention. For the 2023-2024 school year 62 contracted and 13 interim staff members joined the professional staff. The leadership team welcomed the addition of six administrators. The turnover rate for this past year was approximately 5% compared to 6% last year and 5.9% the previous year. The educators were chosen from a candidate pool of approximately 1,700 applicants. The Human Resources Office coordinated the induction of over 60 new staff members on August 24th. Ms. Sabrina Setton, second-grade teacher at Morley Elementary School, helped to moderate the program. New staff were given “words of wisdom” by a group of Webster Hill Elementary students and a presentation on the History of West Hartford Public Schools by Town Historian, Dr. Tracey Wilson. Mr. Duarte spoke about the diversity of the professional

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staff with 22% of new hires identifying as a minority candidate. He also spoke about the Connecticut Teacher Residency Program.

Ms. Elizabeth Hewitt provided a report on the first day of school enrollment. In total, 8,870 students in kindergarten through grade 12 students were enrolled in-district on August 30, 2023. This is an increase of 58 students from the prior year, and 57 more than was projected in the district's enrollment report. There are 3,983 kindergarten through grade 5 students, which is 50 more than projected for the 2023-2024 school year. There are variances at all grade levels, however, the most significant was in kindergarten with an additional 14 and 5th grade with an additional 17 students. The district has 205 elementary elementary classroom sections. The average elementary section has 19.4 students. There were 2,010 students enrolled in middle school on the first day which is an increase of 14 students over the prior year. There are currently 15 more students in 6th grade. In high school, Conard has 1,410 students enrolled, six less than projected, and Hall has 1,394 students, four fewer than projected. The Reach program has 40 students and the Strive program has 33 students.

Questions asked by the Board included total enrollment numbers and what the impacts will be for the date change of August 31st entrance for kindergarteners.

Dr. Steinberg moved and Dr. Harris seconded:

THAT the Board of Education approve the minutes from the Regular Board of Education meeting of June 6, 2023.

Motion passed.

Ms. LaToya Fernandez thanked everyone and she said she is looking forward to serving on the Board.

Announcement of Future Meeting Dates:

1. Tuesday, September 19, 2023, Regular Board of Education meeting, 7:00 p.m., Town Hall, 50 South Main Street, Legislative Chamber, room 314
2. Tuesday, October 3, 2023, Regular Board of Education meeting, 7:00 p.m., Town Hall, 50 South Main Street, Legislative Chamber, room 314
3. Tuesday, October 17, 2023, Regular Board of Education meeting, 7:00 p.m., Town Hall, 50 South Main Street, Legislative Chamber, room 314

There were no requests for future agenda items.

*Approval of the Minutes*

*Information and Reports  
Board Members:  
Communication and Reports*

*Future Business:  
Announcement of Meeting  
Date*

*Request for future Agenda  
Items*

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There were no comments from visitors.

There was no executive session.

Dr. Steinberg moved and Ms. Nesoralla seconded:

Meeting adjourned at 9:12 pm.

Motion passed.

ATTEST:

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Dr. Lorna Thomas-Farquharson, Chairperson

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Ms. Clare Nesoralla, Secretary

Respectfully submitted: Ms. Charlotte Flanagan, Clerk of the Board

*Comments from Visitors*

*Executive Session*

*Adjournment*