

West Hartford Public School District



Agenda Item: Opening of School: Overview and Observation
Meeting Date: September 2, 2014
From: Tom Moore, Superintendent

Since I was named West Hartford's next superintendent last October, I have been dreaming, and planning for two key days; our Convocation and the first day of school. Convocation allowed us to reconnect as professionals, while focusing on why we entered the education profession; to help children learn and become productive adults. I am inspired by the professionals that I work with and have been energized all summer as I watched administrators and teachers discuss and plan for ways to ensure that every child has someone looking out for her or him and that that child knows that we are rooting for her or him. This belief is encapsulated in the call to action that we have put forth for the district, which is "Clear paths. Bright futures. No limits." What this means, in practice, is that we are committed as a district to do all we can to help to provide for a bright future for our children. We know that society, family, and circumstances can sometimes put a limit on us. We are committed to teaching children that they can overcome these limits and that if they believe in themselves, the West Hartford Public Schools will not ever, to any child, pass on the thought that we do not believe that they can succeed. Instead, we will work every day to help clear the path of obstacles for that child. In the end, hopefully, we will teach our children to be able to clear these paths on their own and not see any challenge as insurmountable. For our children to do great things, they need to know that we, their parents, teachers, and community, believe in them. I am committed to ensuring this reality.

The first day of school is when we get to meet our new children and make these dreams our reality. Well over 9500 students crossed the thresholds of our schools on Wednesday, schools that had been readied and prepared for them by committed office staffs, maintenance workers, and custodians for the past six weeks. Bob Palmer, our Director of Plant and Facilities Services, oversaw numerous projects to make our buildings better. There were improvements all around, but what was most notable as I visited every school in the district were the smiles of students who were happy to be back and the energy and enthusiasm of the teachers welcoming them. It was a pleasure to see so many parents at school openings, and it was clear that in West Hartford, education matters to the whole community, and parents love their schools. People invest in this town for the schools, and I want to ensure that we continue to reward that faith.

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This summer we created a new leadership team in the district, as we filled our administrative positions with twelve people who I know will work tirelessly for the benefit of all children. Dr. Andrew Morrow has taken over the position of Assistant Superintendent for Administration and has accomplished much already this summer as he oversaw security improvements and led the continued planning for the new Charter Oak International Academy. We welcomed new principals Steven Cook at Bristow, Ryan Cleary at Morley, Kristi Lavery at Duffy, Jen Derick at Norfeldt, and Andrew Clapsaddle at Sedgwick. Roszema Haskins has moved into her new position as Director of Continuing Education, and oversaw our High School Summer School Program. Joining us as assistant principals are John Guidry at Hall, Kimberlee Henry at Hall, and Marc Kotler at King Philip Middle School. New Department Supervisors are Timothy Kessler, Science Department Supervisor at Conard and Sedgwick; Chad Ellis, Social Studies Supervisor for Hall and King Philip; Stacy Kellogg-Shove, Pupil Services Supervisor; and Ed D'Addio; Middle School Counseling Department Supervisor. We are fortunate to have attracted such a strong pool of candidates and after speaking with them individually, I can tell you that they share a belief in the possibilities of children and are thrilled to be working in West Hartford.

This summer we have worked to ensure that our School and District Development Plans are accessible and understandable, not just for all staff but for our parent community, as well as students. Our goals are clear and can be accessed in a one page Executive Summary that we will discuss at a future Board meeting. Under the direction of both our Steering and TRAC Committees, our TEVAL plan has undergone some changes in order to better meet the needs of teachers, so that we have a process in place that fosters conversations about our work and how we can all look at ways to get better and learn from our colleagues so that our children are surrounded by the best teachers in Connecticut. When we get down to the basics, this process is really about honest reflection. A challenge that I have tried to put out is to “dare to be honest” with ourselves and each other about our work. Our children deserve the finest education, and I believe that our teachers want to be great. Hopefully, we have a process in place that will help that, and not get in the way.

Our schools and teachers have continued to receive many accolades over the summer. Our high schools continue to be ranked among the very best in Connecticut and in the top two per cent nationally. We are starting this year from a position of strength, and we must remember that West Hartford is still a beacon of possibility to many in the education community and Connecticut overall as a place that *works*. People move here to be a part of something special, and other districts are constantly on the lookout to hire our staff because they know the training that our teachers get is second to none. The College Board chose our district as the only public schools in the state to pilot the new AP Capstone courses. Being the superintendent here is the greatest job in the field of education, and the more involved I am with the people of this community, the more I feel like the luckiest man in Connecticut. To top it off, I get to watch my own children go to our schools and tell me at the dinner table about the many special moments during the day. 2014 is off to a great start. I want to thank Dr. Andrew Morrow, Mr. Rick Ledwith, Dr. Nancy DePalma, Ms. Natalie Simpson, Ms. Kerry Jones, Mr. Paul Vicinus, Mr. Chip Ward, Mr. Glenn McGrath and Ms. Roszema Haskins for their tireless work this summer to ensure that we got the year off to a great start while working

hard to plan professional development for our staff that will make us all better leaders. Reports follow that detail their preparations and their work to ready the schools for the 2014-2015 year. Clear Paths. Bright Futures. No Limits. West Hartford will be proud of the people that our schools help produce.