

West Hartford Public School District

Agenda Item: State of the Schools Report
Meeting date: February 7, 2012
From: Karen L. List, Superintendent

Background:

*To inspire and prepare all students to realize their potential
and enhance our global community.*

Our schools have started this year on an excellent footing. We began the year with some of the highest student performance the district has seen on the CMT, CAPT, and AP tests. We are benefitting from a transparent budget process that resulted in a non-controversial 2011-12 budget that builds on the budgets of prior years and enables continuing progress this year. We have had some challenges this year – the October snow storm that resulted in 6 lost school days, but that snowstorm also showed the strength of the school district and the close cooperative relationship that we have with the Town through the successful operation of the shelter at Conard High School. We are appreciative of the wage freeze taken by the teachers, paraprofessional, custodians and secretaries this year. Virtually every employee has taken a wage freeze during the past three years. The sacrifice they have taken preserved resources and supports our efforts to educate all students.

Our Mission Framework and District Goals drive the District Development and Performance Plan (DDPP) which in turn drive the School and Department Development Plans. The coherence of our work is critical to our continuing success. Our curriculum design work based on the internationally benchmarked Common Core State Standards has begun in earnest. This work is long term. We are eager to learn more about the Smarter Balance Assessments our students will complete in 2015. These assessments are in production and will replace the CMT and CAPT.

The implementation of Student Success Plans is underway in our middle schools and will extend to the high schools next year. Our high schools are engaged in the work required to be ready for a successful accreditation visit by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) in 2013. As we proceed we are mindful of incorporating 21st century skills and the components of PA 10-111 that include secondary school reform. This legislation also includes redesigning our teacher and administrator evaluation system. That work begins next week.

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My intent with this State of the Schools report is to set a context for our budget deliberations which we begin tonight with the adoption of the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The CIP is critical to maintaining the quality of the physical plant in our schools. The town has been generous in supporting our past requests for these capital dollars and as a consequence I am proud to say our buildings are in good shape. We will be studying needs of the buildings and grounds beyond those covered in the CIP for future years, but I am comfortable with the CIP level for this year. This CIP request also includes \$1.3 million for WiFi in all our schools. This request is based on our core values of integrating technology effectively and inspiring creativity and innovation. It was a significant recommendation from the technology assessment completed by the Center for Educational Leadership and Technology (CELT).

This year like all the others in recent memory will be a challenging one for the operating budget that I will present to you in about one month. Budget projections reveal challenging times not only for the Board of Education budget, but also the town and state budgets. While expenses like salaries and benefits which account for over 85% of the Board's budget continue to grow, the revenue funding at the state and federal level has been declining overall for the last couple of years. While teacher and administrator pensions are not part of our budget, we have been successful in cutting our pension liability in half for other bargaining groups. The town's operating budget is experiencing stress like it has not seen in previous years. The major source of revenue is the property tax. However, these difficult economic times make raising of those taxes a less feasible option. We hope for more revenue from the state. They are underfunding the town's ECS payment by \$41 million this year. We will continue to focus on budgeting that is strategic, efficient, and accountable. Prioritizing what our professionals need, what our parents want and what our community can afford is the challenge we face in planning for the 2012-13 budget.

Tonight you heard a summary of the NextED Transforming Connecticut's Education System Continuous Improvement Plan from The Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS). In recognition of the significance of this report, I have attempted to show areas of agreement where we are doing what is recommended in the report.

The State of Schools Report illustrates where we have been, where we are (including in relation to the NextEd Report), with our Mission Framework and District Goals serving as our vision for the future. Economic conditions are slowly improving. It is critical that we remain forward thinking because our schools and the results our students achieve are a source of pride and identity for our community.