



SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT TO THE BOARD

To: WSD Board President and Board of Trustees
From: Wilmer Chavarria, WSD Superintendent
Re: **Superintendent's Report for December 2023**
Date: 12/11/2023

Dear Members of The Board,

Below please find my report for **December 2023** and refer any questions about a given item directly to me during the regularly scheduled board meeting or to the Board President and me if your inquiry is prior to the meeting.

Thank you for your work in advancing the mission of our district to form students who will "lead healthy, productive and successful lives and engage with their local and global community."

Respectfully Submitted,

Wilmer A. Chavarria, NBCT
Superintendent of Schools
Winooski School District
wchavarria@wsdvt.org

ADMINISTRATIVE ENGAGEMENTS

- I continue to meet with Elaine Wang, City Manager, for city-schools collaboration.
- On December 12, I am attending the VSA Drop-In session for a discussion on legislative advocacy.
- I am leading the budget conversation for staff on Tuesday December 12 and 19.
- On Thursday December 14, I am attending the Regional Advisory Board meeting for Burlington and Essex CTE.
- On December 16, I am attending a Vermont Latino community event.
- On December 19, I am joining an executive search committee to select the next CEO for the Los Alamos National Laboratory Foundation
- On December 19, I am attending the Regional Standards Board for the area districts.
- On December 22, I am joining fellow regional superintendents to draft a joint Calendar draft for the upcoming year.



KEY DATES

- Budget Conversation Series (Staff), 12/12, 12/19
- Dec 14: Early Release, 12:15, No Pre-K
- Anti-Racism Steering Committee, 12/18
- Budget Presentation V and meeting with legislators, 12/20
- Dec 22- 29: School Recess - No School Pre-K – 12
- Christmas, 12/25
- New Year, 1/1
- Finance Committee Meeting, 1/2



Teachers help our students shine.

GENERAL AND OPERATIONAL UPDATES

- The Fiscal Services office has been busy with the conclusion of open enrollment, the start of the budget season, and preparing for the end of the calendar year. In November we welcomed a new Payroll and Fiscal Services Specialist, Jim Schultz, and are excited to have a full team again. The team continues to work towards closing out FY23 with the completed audit and we plan to have this available in January for the annual report.
- IT concluded E911 compliance testing early this month. The results of these test calls showed accurate location information of each phone number that was tested and in turn, qualify our district for a grant that is over \$60,000.
- Over the recent break, IT completed various projects to enhance our overhead announcement system for message clarity and to ensure important announcements are heard throughout our campus. We added speakers to a couple of areas, and we have identified other areas to add more speakers in the future.
- This month we submitted a letter of support to the Vermont Department of Health for the Winooski Parents and Students Project as part of the “The Community Violence Prevention Program.” The WPSP submitted a grant proposal for \$300,000 over two years to provide community education and access to different family supports. This allows the WSD an additional layer of capacity through a local partner without the burden of grant reporting, accounting, and formal monitoring.



Middle and High School students showcase their chorus talent to much applause from the audience.

GENERAL AND OPERATIONAL UPDATES (CONT.)

- Our Communications Director is currently drafting a set of communications procedures for the WSD in order to systematize the way outreach and other forms of communication are selected, planned, and delivered. As expected, this work requires much thinking and consultation with stakeholders given the diversity of languages in our district and the wide range of services our offices and departments provide to students, families, and the community.
- As we all have seen the season's changing here in Vermont, we are excited to say that working with our newly awarded contractor for snow/ice removal has gone very well. The grounds have been maintained to the fullest with the amount of weather we have had thus far, and communication has been on point. Over Thanksgiving Break, we were able to deep clean a few prone areas that were in desperate need of and we are also looking forward to performing more of this type of work over the December break. We utilize these breaks to do just that, deep clean so we can keep the building looking as good as we can when staff and students return. This, the facilities team believes, is pivotal as appearance plays a big role in the day-to-day learning environment and upkeep of our new building is our main focus.

GENERAL AND OPERATIONAL UPDATES (CONT.)

- Earlier this month, the Director of Finance and Operations and the Superintendent attended the joint VSA and VASBO conference at Lake Morey where important topics related to education finance were covered. Of particular importance was the discussion around the effects of Act 127 for districts across the state and what this means for us in Winooski. Much of our insight is already being reflected in our ongoing budget planning and internal preparedness for our financial future.
- On December 11, Winooski and districts in the area experienced their first snow day of the season. The cancellation of classes and activities was issued before 6 am to staff and after 6 am to families. Winooski was ready to call earlier but we waited for regional coordination with other superintendents and did not call it until at least a few neighboring districts were ready to do the same.
- Our leadership team met with representatives from the AOE to discuss our initial plans as a result of all three of our schools being eligible for “Comprehensive Supports.” As a reminder, this designation was due to primarily the low test scores in standardized testing as presented to you in the first budget context presentation. Luckily this designation comes with a small amount of monetary support and the team is currently discussing how to maximize it without creating a future fiscal cliff.
- I continue to meet regularly with WEA representatives to cover a wide range of matters. These meetings promote problem-solving and mutual learning as it relates to the stipulations of the current contracts.



A parent and WSD team member spends time with his child during 1st Grade Celebration of Learning

GENERAL AND OPERATIONAL UPDATES (CONTINUED)

- Last week, Champlain College met with the WSD to discuss several topics including the potential for a “Grow Your Own” program to serve current students who may wish to have a career in education. Several ideas were brought forward but a more formal proposal will be issued by the college in the Spring. We look forward to a continued partnership. Champlain College currently places several of its students within our classrooms.
- UVM has also kindly approached us about a potential opportunity for partnership specifically to support Special Education teacher development in our district. We are drafting a letter of support for a grant that will make this possible, and, like with the Winooski Parents and Students Project, this makes us glad because we will receive the direct benefits of a large grant without the burden of reporting and administration.
- Our new Options Based Drill video is currently in post-production after a successful filming session with Angela Moulton’s first grade class. Thank you to the wonderful actors who participated and to all the adults that made this possible. This is a topic that can cause a lot of anxiety and so we want to treat it with care. This video will be one more element in our preparation for the upcoming drill early in the Spring.
- The Emergency Operations Plan required by new Board policy is progressing at full speed. Once the main document is completed by the district’s Safety Committee, incident-specific procedures will be added over time until a comprehensive and centralized plan is in place. We are aiming to have much of this completed this school year.

OTHER UPDATES:

Changes to remote work procedures took place recently for all employees, due to the fact that much of the philosophy behind these procedures stemmed from the specific needs of the remote teaching system. With most of that behind us, we thought it fair for everyone to have expectations of in house work for in house services apply to all employees, given the nature of the work of public schools in Vermont. This impacts everyone differently depending on their specific roles, but people with the most unique situations have been granted special transitional waivers as needed on a limited and one time basis.

In the Board’s annual plan, four policies had been listed for a first reading: D3, D4, D6, and F1. However, only D6 (Class Offerings and Class Sizes) will be reviewed and, rather than a first reading, there will be a second reading for it. This is because our records show that there was a first reading during the May 10 meeting of 2023 with no record of subsequent action. The current draft of D6 incorporates feedback from the Board in May and changes from the VSBA in August. D4 (Title 1 Comparability) will not be read because it is not applicable to Winooski SD because this is for districts with a combination of Title 1 and non Title 1 schools, or multiple schools serving the same grade levels. D3 (Responsible Use of Technology) and F1 (Travel Reimbursement) were adopted by the Board in 2022 but they had not been posted to our website by the time of my initial policy audit.



A JFK student receiving personalized support

GENERAL AND OPERATIONAL UPDATES

- Our December 9 community event was a great success. Members of the Board Nicole Mace and Isaiah Donaldson presented a summary of our preliminary budget context and projections for this year and answered questions from the public. There was great insight, great energy, and delicious food. We collected a good number of surveys and will be distributing the online version throughout this week. Please invite any of your contacts to fill it out.
- Our budget conversation series with staff continue to take place every Tuesday after school. We've enjoyed a good rotating number of colleagues coming by and the conversations have been enriching every time. There has been valuable insight from the feedback and even important corrections have been made to some of our documents as a result of the discussions. These meetings also provide the district staff a good opportunity to practice the presentations to the board and community later in a given week.



Pre-K students exploring career and service

TEACHING AND LEARNING UPDATES

- The Winooski Early Childhood Program has started using The Preschool Life Skills (PLS) program, an approach to teaching critical social skills to preschoolers to support school readiness skills. Having these skills helps preschoolers feel confident and ready to have a successful school year.
- The Winooski Early Childhood Program has been hosting monthly family events celebrating children's learning in school. Family engagement is essential to kindergarten readiness and improves children's attendance, academic performance, and classroom behavior. In preschool we want every child's family to be our partners in guiding children's development and learning to ensure a solid foundation for future success in school and life.
- The violent event in Burlington against three young people naturally caused many feelings among our communities, including fear. The needs of our students have been more apparent than usual regarding their sense of belonging and safety in Winooski and the rest of Vermont. While there's no perfect answer to deeply embedded racism and hate that can manifest itself through violence at any time, all educators were directed to make spaces for dialogue, discussion, and learning, and schools ensured that supports for students and families were available and ready.

MORE TEACHING AND LEARNING UPDATES (CONTINUED)

- The Vermont Educational Equity Collaborative, which brings together Directors and Coordinators of Equity across the state, met soon after the events to address our experiences in schools and their respective responses. We feel confident about the work we are continuing and initiating in Winooski, but it is always useful to calibrate and recalibrate with practitioners confronting similar and different obstacles and opportunities across the state.
- Congratulations to JFK for being recognized one more time by the Agency of Education for their outstanding work in Positive Behavior and Intervention Systems (PBIS).
- Before the Board does a second read of the Discipline Policy, we've asked stakeholders to weigh in, including teachers and students. So far we've received direct input from classrooms in all three schools, which has led to insightful conversations. Many thanks to the teachers that have invited the Superintendent to come into their classrooms to initiate these conversations with students. We hope that the eventual policy is reflective of their needs and that it makes the schools a safer and happier place.

High School Students catch up with each other before the next class.





Wonderful chorus singers during the December concert.

- The Board recently approved the funding for a part time BIPOC Mentor Program coordinator. Human Resources has already created an internal posting and applications are being reviewed. We hope to have someone in place before the end of the calendar year.
- A major driver of our designations as schools in need of “Comprehensive Supports” was the low test scores across the board. Initial presentations are taking place in all sites regarding how to coexist with a deeply flawed testing culture in the US. The premise of the message is that while we advocate for systemic change, we do not let the reality and the weight of the tests make our students look bad. The central question being, how do we help our students ace this test without letting it distract us too much from other things that matter?
- To support our families and students needing winter clothing, Winooski Middle & High School PEACE JAM distributed winter Clothing and toys on Saturday, December 2, 2023, at the O'Brien Center, Winooski, from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm.
- HS Counselors have and continue to engage teachers and students in new course proposals and reflection on the current schedule for improvement next year.
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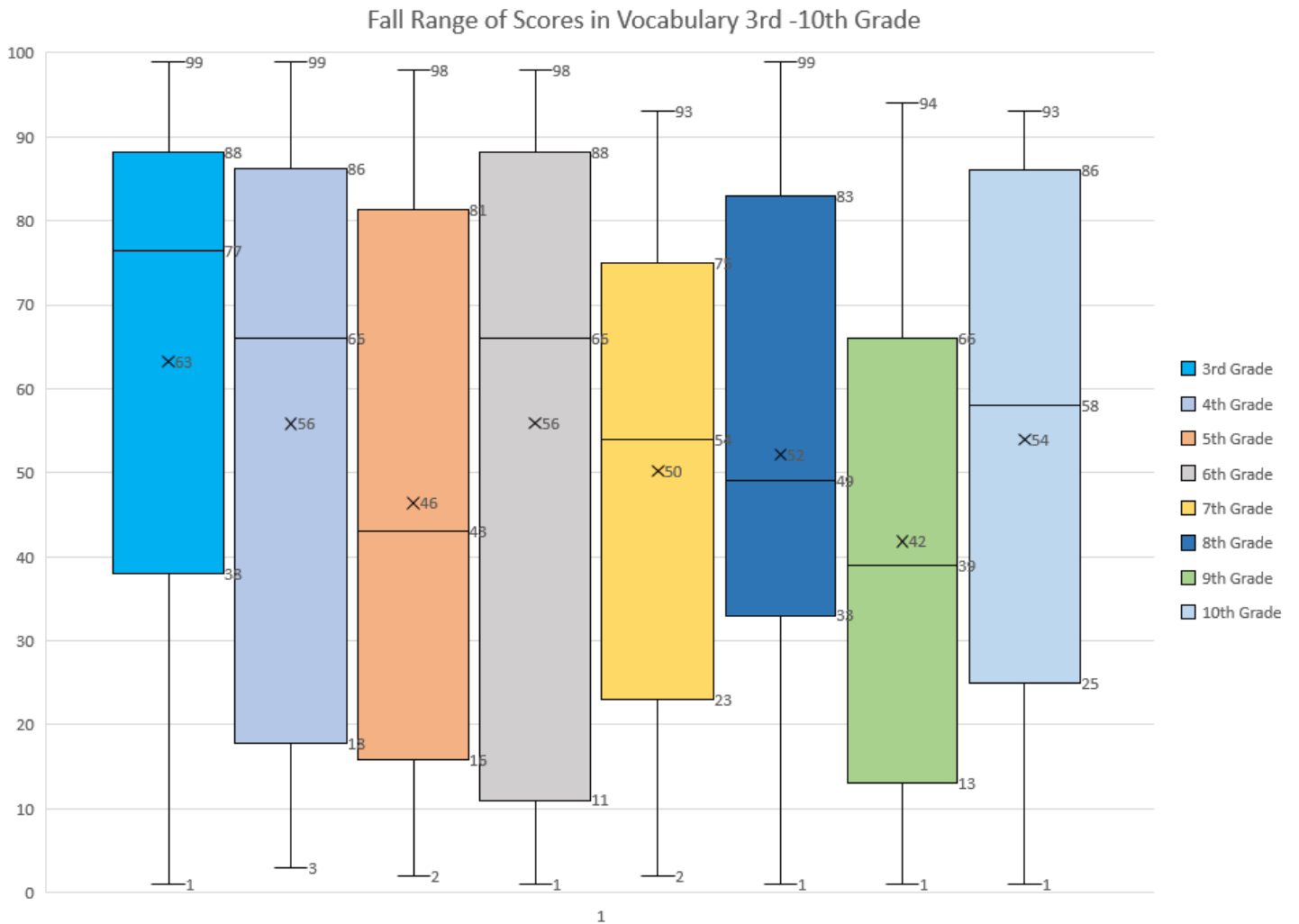


5th graders enjoying a book together.

- As a part of supporting our Multilingual Learners and their families' stability around housing, WSD, in collaboration with CVOEO, Legal AID, Winooski Housing Authority, Winooski Fire Department (safety), and the City of Winooski (Mayor Lott) we, hosted our Nepali community members for a Tenant Skills Workshop last Saturday, December 2 from 3:00 - 4:30 pm.
- In collaboration with Jean Berthiaume, our High School Guidance Counselors, and VSAC (Stevya), the ML Department joined an event around Preparing for Graduation and Beyond (College Info Night) for our 11th and 12th-grade Students and their families on December 7 from 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm
- Professor Jolivette Anderson-Douoning from St. Mike's (SMC) and Bill Clark engaged High School students in a course entitled: American Experience, 1619 to the Present. This semester, Jolivette Anderson-Douoning is bringing that same curriculum she teaches at SMC our high school. She is piloting a new dual enrollment version of the class for out students to receive college credit through Saint Michael's. To read more click [here!](#)
- On November 30, 7th & 8th graders celebrated their Expedition: Facing our monsters! Students explored monsters and mythologies as representations of human fears, challenges, and anxieties through a series of interdisciplinary learning activities. In ELA, students read and analyzed the text Summer of the Mariposas, in which 5 sisters encounter many monsters on a journey. They analyzed the use of symbolism in this text and wrote their own creative narratives featuring monsters. Science class examined the physical and behavioral adaptations organisms need to survive, helping students to consider the adaptations of the monsters in their ELA narratives. In Visual Arts, our middle school artists explored Latin American folk art and visual representations of monsters across different cultures, ultimately creating detailed illustrations of their own monsters. In Theater Arts, they practiced the art of oral storytelling "campfire style" from their written narratives, infusing their spoken stories with intensity and emotion.

The graphs below represent the range of scores on one portion of the Star Assessment. We use the Star Assessment in reading and math grades 3-high school to screen students for needing intervention, to monitor student progress over the year and to assess our performance in math and reading overall. We use because it gives use quick snap shot of how we are performing.

These two box and whisker graphs represent the range of grade level proficiency scores in vocabulary and algebraic thinking. The “x” in each box represents the average score, the line is the score where 50% of students scored above and 50% scored below. Our end of year target score for this assessment is 80. Each “whisker” represents 25% of the students and each part of the box represents 25% of the students.



ITEMS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

Below are a few items the board assigned to management along with a status update.

Item	Board Direction	Status
PBGRs Presentation	The board requested a presentation on Proficiency Based Graduation Requirements during their discussion of Policy D1	Graduation Requirements Presentation took place during the December 6 Special Board Meeting.
PBGRs Policy	D1 Policy to be sent for work and analysis to the High School teams and will return for a Second Reading in the Spring	D1 Policy has been sent to the high school and Director of Curriculum. Work has started for review and analysis with school-based teams. New draft will be ready in the Spring.
PBGRs Policy	Board Member Steven was “immigration factors” in D1 to be changed because it can be misunderstood outside of this context.	Language has been updated to “previous educational access.”
Animal Dissection	Board Secretary Isaiah wanted to know whether we, in practice, carry out dissection in schools.	Our administrators did not report such a practice.
Student Voice	The Board discussed student representation but was hesitant to establish policy related to it, instead it suggested to direct the superintendent to bring students to the Board. The superintendent reminded everyone that after the students are in the meeting, he has no authority over Board meeting procedures or the incorporation of the students into Board business, hence the need for Board decision via policy. Board member Nicole Mace recommended the Board review the guide created by the VSBA	The guide was provided to Board members for review. Policy recommendation was drafted and is included as a first read in for the December 13 Board meeting. Should the Board not adopt Policy, the superintendent will recruit students to be on the Board but will be unable to explain to students what their function will be. The superintendent strongly recommends the Board have a plan if policy is not an option it wants to consider.

Board Self Assessment	7b – Board Self Assessment was tabled until a later meeting.	7b – Board Self Assessment took place during the November 29 Special Meeting. The Board made an official recommitment to Policy Governance, Board learning, and to creating a robust onboarding process for new members.
Budget Options	The Board leaned toward Options 3 and 4 (maintaining the same tax rate or even decreasing it).	The superintendent removed options 1, 2 and 6 and maintained the remaining options as parameters for the administration to: 1) make efforts to minimize the possibility of cuts/discontinuation of a service and 2) try to meet other needs that are not directly funded (like planning time for JFK and increasing ML liaison time).

RECOMMENDED ITEMS TO REVIEW

It is my recommendation that the board review all agenda items in your packet ahead of time and be prepared to approve the Consent Agenda and other applicable items produced by the administration and listed for approval.