



SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT TO THE BOARD

To: WSD Board President and Board of Trustees
From: Wilmer Chavarria, WSD Superintendent
Re: **Superintendent's Report for January and February 2024**
Date: 2/14/2024

Dear Members of The Board,

Below please find my report for **January and February 2024** 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
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ADMINISTRATIVE ENGAGEMENTS

- As usual, this week I am meeting with the City Manager to collaborate and co-plan between the city and the district.
- I am attending several classroom events and activities in the schools in the next few weeks. I visit classrooms whenever invited by teachers and as much as my calendar allows.
- I am attending the Regional Standards Board meeting this Friday afternoon.
- I am attending city-district budget presentations on Monday February 19 at 4 PM and then the Anti-racism Steering Committee afterwards.
- On Friday, February 23, I am attending a Chittenden area superintendents' meeting regarding our larger regional calendar. I am also attending the Vermont Educational Equity Collaborative meeting taking place in the Essex-Westford district that same day.
- I will be attending meetings on multiple dates for the Los Alamos National Laboratory Foundation, as part of the 4-person committee tasked with the new CEO search.



KEY DATES

- 2/19: City-WSD Budget Presentation @O'Brien Community Center, 4 PM
- February: Black History Month
- 2/22 & 23: MHS P/T Conf., Early Release 11:00am, JFK In-service
- 2/26-3/5: School Recess, No School Pre-K – 12, Staff return 03/4
- 03/4: Annual Meeting @WSD, 6 PM
- 03/5: Town Meeting Day, 7 AM – 7 PM, Winooski Senior Center
- 03/05: WSD Staff Wellness Day
- 03/7: Board Policy Governance Training



Students take a little break during their PE class in our new gym.

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

Much has happened in the legislature over the past few weeks since the Board furnished an urgent letter to legislators and decision makers regarding the 5% transitioning mechanism of Act 127. As of this week, measures have made it through the legislative process in an expedited way that will likely lead to the repealing of the 5% cap while replacing it with a different transitioning mechanism. The same bill would also allow districts to “cancel a district vote on the fiscal year 2025 budget, amend the proposed budget, and hold a vote at a later date.” From what I am hearing in the field, not many districts plan to re-warn their budgets even if this becomes law. The new transition mechanism would identify the relative percentage “loss” of Weighted Long-Term Membership for a given district under the new Act 127 weights and match this percentage to a proportionate discount in the Equalized Homestead Tax Rate (pre CLA). For example, if a given district “lost” 8% of its share of weighted membership relative to the rest of the state, the district will receive an 8-cent discount in the rate. This discount will continue for 5 years but gradually decrease. This will also make it that the support for district with a percentage loss of WLTM share is more proportional between the loss and the support. My district administration is generally supportive of this legislative proposal, and I encourage the Winooski Board of Trustees to advocate for its passage.



START OF THE SCHOOL DAY

After much discussion about the state of support systems for students in the district and the level of readiness of staff to meet the changing demands in education, I have concluded that our schools are chronically under-equipped to promote consistent and relevant professional development that is embedded throughout the school year. One major factor that contributes to this deficiency is the very limited contractual time in the day for teachers, staff, and administrators to engage in effective, efficient, and meaningful collaboration and collective learning. Staff meetings are usually carried out in a rush in the short 30 minutes before students arrive at the classroom door, and professional learning is limited to little windows of opportunity here and there. As a strong believer in the power that professional learning and collaboration can have in the quality of learning that our students receive, I am exploring the modification of the start time for our schools from 8:00 AM to 8:15 AM. This would still provide more than the legally required instructional time and would put us just above the average in total instructional time in the region. Currently, our teachers teach for more total minutes in the day than most schools in the area. The additional 15 minutes will make a significant difference in the flexibility that it provides administrators and staff to finally have more productive meetings and potentially allow us to initiate bi-weekly Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to allow teams of educators and staff to discuss student data and strategize best practices in response to the data. I trust that the improved quality of instruction for our students resulting from this ongoing professional growth is a worthy exchange for these 15 minutes. I ask the Board to be of support as communicating this reasoning to our community will be important. An announcement will be made concurrently with our new calendar.

NEW STAKEHOLDER- REVIEWED POLICY:

The Board has carried out a first read for the new proposed C15 Student Conduct and Discipline Policy and D1 Graduation Requirements Policy. These were sent back for stakeholder input, including students and focus groups. You will be presented with D1 for a second read during this month's meeting. C15 will be presented in March.



Regional Calendar decision from CVSA: The Champlain Valley Superintendents Association voted last Friday to adopt a regional calendar. This calendar (provided in the packet) standardizes student days and holidays for the region while leaving a few options for customization. This allows less flexibility in localizing preferences or changing things last minute unilaterally. The trade-off is better consistency from town to town and support for Career and Technical Centers that struggle to maintain consistent student attendance when different sending districts have different student days. I voted for the adoption of this regional calendar, and I ask for your support.

GENERAL AND OPERATIONAL UPDATES

- **Policy-based procedures** are being posted this week. Some important ones include Selection of Library Materials, Challenges to Library Materials, Parent and Family Engagement (Title 1), Admissions Under Factors Affecting Residence Determination, Compelled or Perceived Obligatory Ceremonies with Religious Content (Replaces: “Patriotic Exercises” of 9/17/2014), Guidance on Pronouns, Previously Approved Messages and Displays, Front Entrance Procedures, District Mass Communications, and High School Choice Capacity. These will be posted on the website under the Board category, Administrative Procedures subcategory. More updates and new procedures will continue to be added.
- **The Annual Report and Budget Flyer** have been published and distributed. This was a major undertaking as is normally the case every year, but the additional variables from Act 127 and the city-wide reappraisal made it even more necessary to triple check numbers and messaging. Thank you to everyone who contributed to this. We hope that Winooski voters support our proposed budget on March 5.
- **Newsletter changes:** After a request from the city to discuss increased newsletter costs and unexpectedly large invoices from the WSD, I issued a memo directing the team to make some major modifications to the newsletter production and publishing process, the most important being cutting its length almost by a half. This still covers the most important portions that residents have come to expect while bringing the expenses closer to what both the city and the school district have originally budgeted for. An additional change is that before it is sent out for editing and publishing, our Director of Communications compiles the WSD’s portion, pre-edits, and sends over to the final editor. This ensures that we remain within the agreed-upon limits.



Students tackle problems collectively with the support of their teacher in a small group setting.

GENERAL AND OPERATIONAL UPDATES (CONT.)

- **City-WSD MOU:** This week I will be signing, along with the City Manager, this year's Memorandum of Understanding. Most language remains the same with the following changes: item 2 changes the hourly rate for police support events after regular hours from \$47.10 to \$50; item 5 adds the language "with the understanding that the Parties will endeavor to keep the total cost to \$40,000 for the year" (this is regarding the newsletter); and item 6 adds that "City use of District facilities will not interfere with the educational programming of the schools. All school-initiated and school-endorsed activities have priority. The District will make every reasonable effort to communicate to the City their own schedule for the gyms as soon as possible, both as scheduled or if changed from that schedule."
- **April 8 Eclipse Plan:** The original plan to dismiss students by 12:15 on April 8th remains the same. We hope this will provide enough time to get everyone home safe before the expected congestion in several routes. Originally, it had been stated that staff would be dismissed "by 2 PM," and we were hoping to do some safety for at least one hour after student dismissal. Given the new information about the event, I would like to cancel the afternoon plan for staff and dismiss everyone (teachers and staff) by 12:30 or as soon as feasible and as soon as all students are gone. All other afternoon activities are still canceled. This is to ensure everyone has enough time to make it home, especially for people who have to get on the highway.

GENERAL AND OPERATIONAL UPDATES (CONT.)

- **Our second Options Based Drill** took place around 12:30 on Wednesday January 24. Students and staff were notified ahead of time of the day (not the time) and instructions were provided around expectations and instructions for a real situation. We expect these drills to cause varied emotional responses from our school community. We are required by state law and rules to conduct two of these drills every year. Because our approach is “Run-Hide-Fight,” our District Public Safety Committee decided to carry out three drills this year, one for each word. We are due for the “Fight” drill later in the spring, but we are asking students, staff, and community for feedback on how we should approach this. You are welcome to provide input in this process in your capacity as a board member or if you hear from any of your constituents.
- **Lobby Banners:** You may have noticed the wonderful murals slowly coming to life around the building. We are excited for this to be completed in the future and for them to become a part of a greater beautification strategy of our school district. We are actively working on other projects concurrently, including the creation of large banners for the main lobby and the update on graphics in the main page of our website. While some of these efforts have no direct funding within our current local budget, the business office has found some potential funds that could be used in the meantime. We hope to increase these efforts over the next few years and identify sustainable funding. As mentioned in previous board meetings, the image of the district can go a long way and prove to be a worthy investment.

Students check on their germinating plants as part of their Middle School Science class.





MORE UPDATES

- **From the Facilities Team:** Over break, the Facilities Team was able to complete some much-needed deep cleaning across the District (which is something we don't get a chance to do as often as we would like). We utilize these breaks when we can, not only for deep cleaning. We also perform preventative maintenance and required inspections. We are pleased to announce that we have hired the first woman Facilities Team Member in a very long time! Please help us welcome, Sarah Willette. Sarah has knowledgeable experience in HVAC as well as building trades which has proven to be very helpful to the team. We are gearing up for February break where we will be performing more of our "deep cleaning" we typically do over the breaks as mentioned. We utilize the upcoming weeks to prioritize our deep cleaning schedule and plan amongst the team how our approach will plan out so we executive our target goals of building wide cleaning. Some areas always need more attention than others! With the winter season being light the last few weeks, maintaining the grounds has been a breeze and the continuation of working with our hired contractor has been very successful. We look forward to February flying by and the thoughts of spring soon ahead.
- **Our Winooski Preschool** Programs continue to struggle to hire support staff. We currently have 6 openings, and the lack of support staff has caused us to close preschool classrooms 16 times since opening on September 5. Please spread the word about these openings.
- **The Fiscal Services office** has processed year-end reports and completed the FY23 audit. We spent much of December working diligently on a budget for the FY25 school year. Our team is working to cross-train all team members and ensure stability within our department. We are excited to head into another hiring season and look forward to the search for a new Finance Accounting Associate.

COLLEGE AND CAREER READY

- **Financial Aid Night-** After a big delay, the federal student aid form known as the FAFSA reopens with big changes. This application determines how much financial assistance families will receive to pay for college. On Thursday, January 18, 2024 @5:30 p.m. the high school counselors in partnership with VSAC hosted an evening where students and families learned more about FAFSA.
- **On December 14th**, our high schools students attended an Opportunities Fair where they participated in workshops, learned about career options, and engaged in hands-on activities making, building, and experimenting. As part of the career fair – lots and lots of organizations participated with tables set up similar to a college fair in and around the main gym.
- **The MHS Instructional Leadership Team** has prepared for our 3rd Springpoint Visit to our school. The last 2 visits have focused on the high school, this time we have asked the visiting team to focus on our work as a middle/high school and our goals around: Goal #1: Re-engage and reunify our school community through the creation of a school-wide instructional vision; Goal #2: Revisit GXs/transferable skills and PoG in the visioning process in a manner that builds on strengths while allowing for new ideas from a wide variety of stakeholders; Goal #3: Establish student and family friendly protocols/processes for sharing learning progress (benchmark data, course work, report cards, transcripts). Springpoint (through the Barr Foundation) School observation visits provide instructional leadership teams with evidence-based feedback and thought partnership to help improve, no matter where they are in their continuous improvement journey.

On Thursday, February 1st, we received two kindergarten teachers, an ML teacher, and their Director of Diversity and Inclusion, all from Shelburne Community School, who came to visit and learn about our co-teaching model and the strategies we have in place to support our ML learners. Ms. Forbes and Ms. O'Brien, who co-teach Kindergarten EL, hosted 8:45 - 9:45. The visiting team explored our newly renovated school and was impressed with our beautiful and welcoming space for our learning community.

Surrounding districts continue to show interest in our literacy work. We have had two visits from Essex, one from Missisquoi, and South Burlington is visiting later this month.

Our middle school math teachers have been invited by All Learners Network to work with a school in Colorado to show them how we developing strong interventions for middle school math.

The IT Department is actively engaged in facilitating diverse testing environments this month, including STAR assessments, NAEP assessments, and WIDA assessments. Collaborating with different departments, the team is efficiently coordinating devices for testing and ensuring seamless integration of all testing requirements within our network infrastructure. Their comprehensive support underscores the department's commitment to a smooth and successful testing process across various assessments.



A conversation between High School students during independent time.

LOCAL AND GLOBAL COMMUNITY

- **Congratulations** to Nadja Douoning and Apolina Mbeleci for being awarded as Presidential Scholars. The Recognition Ceremony was held on January 22nd at the State House in the House Chamber. The U.S. Presidential Scholars Program was established in 1964, by executive order of the President, to recognize and honor some of our nation's most distinguished graduating high school seniors.
- **The Sixth Grade** Team just launched an Expedition called Better Together: The Great International Dumpling Challenge. Over seven weeks, sixth graders will use hydroponics to grow herbs that are used to make dumplings. Why dumplings? When defined broadly as “dough that encases a filling” or “dough that sits on top of a filling,” this food is found and loved in cultures around the world. As such, our project celebrates the diversity of our students and opens the door for cross-cultural exchange.
- **The WIDA ACCESS** for ELLs and the WIDA Alternate ACCESS for ELLs are required K-12 yearly summative assessments of students' English language abilities in Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking, for students identified as English Learners (ELs). Our ML Department, teachers, and students have been working on this yearly state requirement.

LOCAL AND GLOBAL COMMUNITY

- **From Athletics:** On December 30th we held our second annual Alumni Game. It was nice to see old Spartans. The community came out to support this game. On January 23rd we had a quadruple header. Empowering Women through careers and sports games. We had an all female officiating crew and various women in careers speaking about their experiences. This day was to celebrate and recognize women's voices. We had guest speakers during the halftime of the Varsity game. On January 29th and January 31st, we hosted coaches vs Cancer games. This is a service project by the players of the Varsity Boys and Girls teams. We want to raise awareness about this deadly disease that has impacted all of our lives in some fashion. We raise money for local cancer treatment.
- **The IT Department** expresses gratitude to the Multilingual Department for their collaborative efforts in enhancing the visibility and welcoming ambiance of our IT helpdesk door. Their partnership has significantly contributed to creating a more accessible and inviting experience for students, staff, and the broader community (see picture of new door on the left).



HEALTHY, PRODUCTIVE AND SUCCESSFUL LIVES

- **The Winooski 21C Afterschool Program** received multiple commendations from the November AOE site visit which included: "The school-afterschool integration across systems and staff is extremely strong and supports the program outcomes substantially. There is a diverse "market basket" of k-12 services and approaches embedded in the program and partnerships over the entire year ". 21C site visits happen in order to work collaboratively with the Vermont Agency of Education, VT21C staff from the field, and others on the local level to address the continuous improvement of each 21C funded afterschool and summer program.
- **The Winooski School District** follows the expectations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act to locate, identify, and evaluate children who have disabilities. Our Early Learning team is coordinating our yearly Child Find event where our Early Childhood Special Educators will screen children's development as well as register age-eligible children for preschool next year.



Middle School students supporting each other in math class.

HEALTHY, PRODUCTIVE AND SUCCESSFUL LIVES

- Students with access to quality early childhood education experiences are more prepared to be successful in school. Our Winooski Early Childhood Program is hosting a Preschool Registration and Skills Screening event on March 15, 2024. This opportunity allows families can come into the school to meet our Early Learning team, see the classrooms, ask questions, and register for a spot in our program for the 2024-2025 school year.
- Wellness Coordinator Updates: We hosted a staff breakfast for all our staff this January 12th (this is a great opportunity to have all our staff around the school district to meet others and share something to eat with others); we are having our staff Wellness Day on March 5th, a schedule with lots of fun activities went out recently; Yoga is now available on a weekly basis for staff and students; housing support is still available for our students and families and; we have provided halal chickens to our Muslim students and families at the school store.
- “Moms Demand Action” donated 15 gun locks for the schools to provide free of charge to any parent or guardian that requests one. We are supportive of this measure and will continue to collaborate to tackle gun violence against children from all fronts.
- We have just been identified by the VT AOE with disproportionality in our identification of white students with emotional disturbance (ED); Our Director of Student Services is actively assembling a team to review the determination and carry out all the state-required states for remediation. This might be a time-consuming endeavor, especially because most factors that lead to this identification are outside the schools’ control.



Students at the High School engage in critical conversation in a seminar-style activity.

ITEMS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

After careful review by Krista and me, it appears that the Board did not direct the administration for anything that required reporting for today. Most things were resolved during the meeting or postponed to later in the Spring.

Item	Board Direction	Status

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.