



# SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT TO THE BOARD

**To:** WSD Board President and Board of Trustees  
**From:** Wilmer Chavarria, WSD Superintendent  
**Re:** **Superintendent's Report for July and August 2024**  
**Date:** 8/10/2024

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Dear Members of The Board,

Below please find my report for **July and August 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 Ends Statement 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**  
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Students work in small groups in JFK. By now most have become used to our visits and the sound of the sporadic camera click.

## WELCOME

**Convocation takes place on Thursday August 22 for all district employees.** Robert Millar will represent the school board in welcoming our faculty and staff to our new school year and will hopefully be joined by Mayor Kristine Lott as we do every year. Several exciting new things are happening this year, including welcoming new faculty to critical roles such as new Pre-K teachers in our newly expanded program, additional special educators, our new Social Justice teacher, and (hopefully hired by then) our new School Safety Coordinator. In addition to welcoming our new faces and celebrating our hard-working teams, we will kick off the year with some strong collective learning led by our students. We have reserved most of the convocation time for breakout workshop sessions in 5 different spaces around the building where staff will be able to attend two sessions of their choice and learn about how our students experience their schooling from a critical lens. You are welcome to join any of the workshops starting at noon if you have the availability.

**The same day as the Convocation** (August 22nd), we are inviting families to our annual Back to School BBQ with a small addition: a family orientation. Families are invited to arrive at 4 PM and be guided (by our staff) to specific rooms depending on the language spoken. There they will receive brief orientation sessions around important topics such as digital safety or curriculum. At 5:30 families will be invited to pick up a meal ticket by visiting their classroom teacher so that they use this as an opportunity to greet each other and receive any classroom-specific information. Then starting at 5:50 we will enjoy the BBQ outside as usual. Board members are strongly encouraged to attend and to interact with our families during this time. If you cannot make it for the 4:00 PM workshops, try to do your best to attend the celebration portion at 5:50.

## NEW YEAR NEW BUDGET

Following the release of the final education tax rate for Winooski in early July and the subsequent tax bills, multiple inquiries (though not excessive in number) have evidenced that some members of our community still struggle to understand how the bills ended up being what they are. We expected this and the board made efforts to invite the public to become involved during the budgeting process leading up to the vote in early March. However, as in most of Vermont, there is low engagement with the process for different reasons, and some taxpayers only become engaged once they have been negatively impacted. This past year was particularly challenging for Winooski. In addition to the myriad unknowns coming from the state (agencies, districts, and the legislature), the city-wide reappraisal happening simultaneously made this process even more convoluted for most Winooski taxpayers, possibly also leading to further disengagement. While we hope that the most difficult and unpredictable variables from this past year will not play as big a role in our next process, and that we might be able to provide more consistent and generalized numbers to taxpayers in a non-reappraisal year, the budgetary challenges of increasing costs and potentially diminishing revenue of next year will also make it critical for the Board to accelerate its outreach efforts and build on the opportunities from last year. As mentioned in an email to all members earlier in the summer, our final rate is \$1.26 down from \$2.16 last year. Even this significant reduction was not able to make up for the historic increases in property values in Winooski now officialized through the new grand list after the reappraisal. This meant that even with a lower tax rate, the average Winooski taxpayer (not paying based on income) saw an increase in their tax bill, with the actual increase depending on how big a jump in their assessed property value was.

## INVESTING IN EARLY LEARNING

**This summer** Early Learning is working on expanding the Winooski Early Childhood Program (WECP) and will have 4 classrooms ready for the start of the school year. The addition would support families who need a longer day option, 8:15 am to 3:00 pm. We have hired all the professionals and support staff required to ensure compliance with the preschool licensing ratio regulations.






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The WEA (union) and the WSD continue to collaborate in creating concrete guidelines that can support me and my office in consistently and predictably placing new employees in the salary grids. We have carried out two full meetings and important decisions have been made, such as deciding potential placement for teachers with experience in education outside public schools or teachers with experiences in places where similar licenses are not required. Our current and immediate future effort focuses on breaking up specific considerations for different roles and categories of employees. We expect to maintain these preliminary decisions internally for now, but both the union and the WSD are welcome to share information as needed for specific situations.

## GENERAL AND OPERATIONAL UPDATES

- **IT is working with facilities to migrate** Preventative Maintenance schedules from existing spreadsheets to a workflow system that will track inventory, warranties, PM schedules, and costs to be reportable to the board upon request. IT is planning on having this system operational by the end of September, but we will continue to have this as a focus and update the superintendent periodically.
- **The IT department has numerous projects** to handle before and after the start of the school year. Currently, our team is auditing our inventory and classroom technology to ensure a smooth beginning of the school year. New hardware and supplies have been ordered and processed to be ready for use as soon as students return.
- **On August 15th we will welcome all our new teachers** and new support staff to the WSD. The day is designed to introduce everyone to the nuts and bolts of being an employee in our district but to also provide a fun and welcoming “first impression” of our offices and personnel. Among other activities, new teachers and staff will participate in a fun scavenger hunt, receive a welcome from the city, have lunch with mentors, and get a short workshop from one of our outstanding teachers, Caitlin MacLeod-Bluver, on best practices when working with students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This is the first year when support staff join teachers for this day in hopes that the experience of our support staff can be a more positive one as we move into the future.
- **Our treasurer had to resign due to a change in residence**, but he (Matt) is willing to continue on the role until a new person is elected, as well as supporting the new person with onboarding. We are waiting on further guidance from the City Clerk about next steps.
- **Sports registration is now online.** We have simplified the registration process, and all waivers are now signed digitally. The new Athletic Statewide Scheduling (ArbiterSports) will keep families posted on schedule changes for your “follow teams.” To receive notifications, families can sign up on [ArbiterSports.com](https://ArbiterSports.com).



Students find each other at the end of the day to make sure they go home together.

## SUMMER DEVELOPMENT

**Our board retreat was a success**, and except for one board member, this would count as this board's second retreat. I am pleased that some institutional memory is starting to be built and that we have managed to remain relatively constant so far. Your engagement with difficult and profound questions about our Ends Statement was not only the culmination of a year of settling into the identity of this board, but also the initiation of an important long-term strategic process of aligning board actions and oversight of the district with the identified indicators of compliance from our global Ends Policy. I look forward to a year of methodic and purposeful exploration of the work you kicked off. I would also like to extend gratitude and appreciation for the administrators who worked hard to bring more clarity and structure to their own vision and work in the schools by engaging with a similar level of calibration based on our Ends Statement. The presentation the board received during their retreat was an appropriate illustration of the type of alignment and focused work that is possible when we coalesce around a goal. Administrators will continue to assist me with providing the type and level of evidence that you require throughout the year to make informed decisions and ensure compliance with your policies.

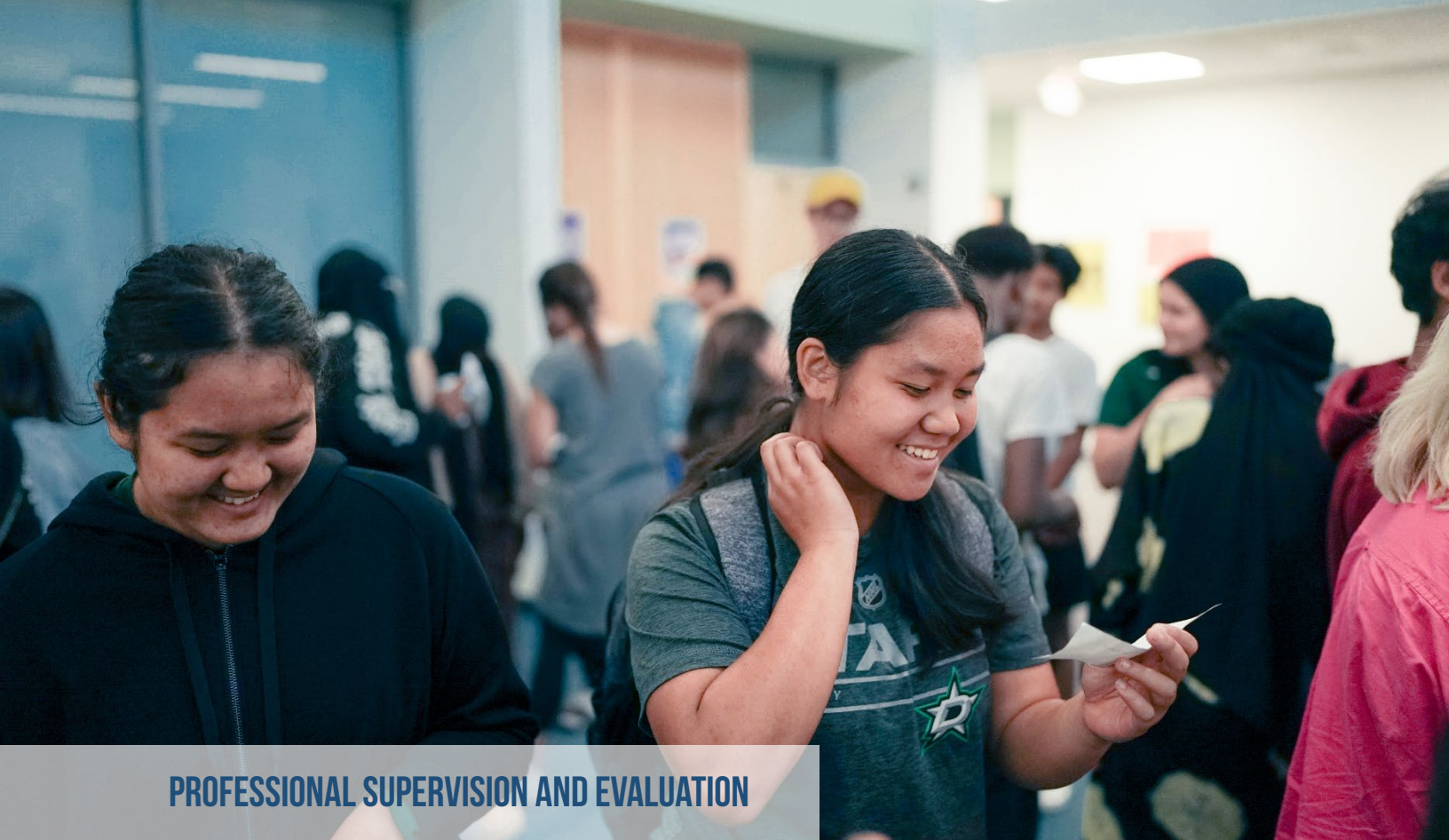


## FROM FACILITIES

**Since graduation** on June 15th, the Facilities Team jumped into our busiest time of year with summer cleaning. The workload is extensive as we deep clean the entire building, roughly 215,000 sq/ft from top to bottom. We clean everything from classrooms, offices, common areas, hallways and all in-betweens. Washing walls, cleaning all furniture in each space, washing all windows, inside and out and extracting every inch of carpet throughout the building are just some of the things our team does. This year we also had our rep from Nora Flooring come in and perform a demo for our team so we can all learn how to bring those floors back up to original install perfection. These floors are in the art rooms, science rooms and a few other rooms with smaller footprints. We are excited to witness how they turn out, so far so good!

**As we approach the incoming school year**, we are gearing up for our safety check building wide to ensure nothing is missed and all areas are safe for our students. We are working on the grounds so they look their best prior to students and our community coming in for the first day of school. This is important to our team as visualizing is everything to the common eye and we love to wow everyone with the transformation we have done over the summer months in preparation for this day. All inspections are up to date and ready for the school year to start and we have had our annual Fire Marshall walkthrough which went well, only a few minor fixes. The Facilities Team will be ready for our students to return on the 26th! We can't wait to see all the smiling faces when they return.





## PROFESSIONAL SUPERVISION AND EVALUATION

**Maybeline Lopez has led** an effort since the spring to draft a new and improved process for professional staff evaluation, especially as we move toward a system where clarity of expectations and authentic evidence are necessary to make good decisions. A final guide will be provided to professional staff upon return. The new process keeps most of the central parts of the old one while considerably simplifying and streamlining aspects that were mostly scattered. This plan, however, also increases the pressure on administrators to remain present in classrooms and learning spaces throughout the year, making periodic walkthroughs and feedback a critical part of supervision and evaluation. A few things that will simplify yet enhance this process are as follows:

- Formal evaluation cycles will become 4-year cycles rather than 3 years.
- After the two initial formal evaluations for a probationary licensed staff in their first two years, the third year does not start with a formal evaluation but rather an “independent growth cycle.”
- Intensive Supports Plans will still be issued to staff members who have demonstrated serious deficiencies regardless of where in the 4-year cycle they are, but specific deadlines and progress monitoring timelines were added to the guide.
- Administrators are required to carry out and document walkthroughs every year during the 4-year cycle.
- All forms have been standardized.
- Criteria for success has been simplified to only 10 indicators.
- All documents, forms, and instructions have been consolidated into a single guide for both administrators and employees so that all information lives in one place and that everyone is looking at the same set of expectations.

## WINOOSKI TOGETHER

The WSD and the City of Winooski co-organized a June 22nd “Winooski Together” event to update members of the community about our progress since the release of the Equity Audit and to celebrate Winooski champions who have collaborated to accomplish positive change and to impact the lives of Winooski children and families. We were pleased with the level of engagement and energy during this day and were happy to collect valuable input especially during the action portion of the event. There was an additional follow up event on June 27 where additional input was gathered. While much of the original intent of this effort was to promote the empowerment of community members to share on the work that takes collectively to achieve the goals from the Equity Audit, we understand that the city and the schools still hold a significant amount of influence and practical power in facilitating many of these outcomes. While we continue to encourage all residents to take action independently, especially for things the district or the city are neither legally nor materially equipped to do, we will continue to be important players in the next steps both jointly and separately depending on the matter. For example:

- **City Leaders' Review:** City and WSD leaders will review the spreadsheet containing all the priorities and action ideas generated by the community during the June meetings. They will add information about what is already happening and identify resources that can help move some of these ideas forward, especially those that fall directly within the functions and budgetary capacity of the city and schools. The ability of the City and school district to be part of moving the ideas forward will depend on budget, but there may be opportunities for other parts of the community to make progress regardless.
- **Targeted Meetings Plan:** The Creative Discourse Group will draft a plan for a series of targeted meetings to inform the community about work that is already underway and to connect interested community members with decision-makers and resources that can help the community make progress on specific actions.
- **Community Involvement:** The Equity Action Committee and interested community members will be invited to review and help refine these plans. A survey is being provided for members of the public to let us know how they would like to participate in this process as well as their availability.

### Professional Learning

**Communities (PLCs)** will start this year as a central part of our plan to encourage collegiality, peer-to-peer professional learning, and analysis of student data to enhance our methods. We have spent this summer creating a guide for teachers and professional staff to begin these communities in a way that feels natural. The guide was reviewed and improved by the WSD leadership team during the July retreat and will be shared with staff upon returning from the summer break. As mentioned during the presentation to the Board in the spring, PLCs will take place every other week and will cover the three areas our WSD-WEA side letter specified:

1. Examining subject or grade-level student work for calibration.
2. Examining student growth data to enhance the system of support.
  - a. VTCAP
  - b. Star Assessments
  - c. WIDA
  - d. Locally-created assessment or survey
  - e. Other relevant student data
3. Professional learning for the teaching practice (articles, reports, research, media, etc.).
  - a. The guide offers an Appendix for suggestions or ideas.





## MORE LEARNING UPDATES

- **Winooski HS Multilingual students** took part in a week-long literacy intensive program. The theme was Community Services. Students read 10 fiction and nonfiction books and learned 25 new Tier 2 vocabulary words. As part of the program, students took trips every day to explore different community services, including the library, the post office, and a bus trip to Burlington. The final community experience was a lunch out at Sneakers where students had the opportunity to practice ordering in English and trying American food they had never eaten before. Students shared that they appreciated the opportunity to see their teachers over the summer, read new books and were happy to spend some time at school. Thanks to VSAC Gear Up Funding, students have access to online books at their level for the rest of the summer.
- **Recent Winooski graduates participated** in “Steps to Success,” a program held over six Tuesdays in collaboration with Northcountry Federal Credit Union. The program offered an inside look at credit union operations and provided students with opportunities to work on their resumes, learn about workplace etiquette, and engage in mock interviews.
- **In June, 50 teachers across all three schools** participated in our School Development Institute. This is the first year JFK teachers participated. They worked on various activities, from learning to plan in a proficiency-based system to refining ELA and Math units in a Responsive Classroom.
- **We took a small team to the High-Quality Work** seminar in Providence, RI. The session gave us plenty to think about, and we are developing an action plan to use high-quality work as a catalyst for improving student engagement and learning.
- **During preservice, we will act** on the next stage of our literacy plan by launching the "Skills Block," or foundational skills component of the EL curriculum. This means we will phase out Foundations over the next two years.
- **2024 Public Safety Camp took** place on June 24 through the 28th. Students explored different careers in public safety from local government agencies to federal agencies including Firefighting, Emergency Medical Services, Search and Rescue, and Law Enforcement. Students learned life-saving skills and got hands-on practical skills experience.

## ADMINISTRATIVE ENGAGEMENTS

- I am in Santa Fe the weekend of August 9 for LANL Foundation committee responsibilities in selecting the next CEO.
- I will be attending a meeting with the city manager on August 12.
- I am at Harvard Friday August 16 for the launch of the 2024-2025 school year of the ELOE graduate program (Education Leadership, Organizations, and Entrepreneurship).
- Later that day (August 16), I am attending the latter part of the Champlain Valley Superintendents' Association annual retreat.



## KEY DATES

- **Friday, August 16:** Veggie VanGo: 9:00am-10:00am
- **Thursday, August 22:** Family Orientation and Back to School BBQ: 4 PM - 6:50 PM
- **Monday, August 26:** First Day of School for K-5 (Full Day: 8:15 AM - 3:00 PM)  
Orientation for 6th & 9th Graders (8:15 AM - 12:15 PM)
- **Tuesday, August 27:** First Full Day of School for Grades 6-12 (8:15 AM - 3:00 PM)
- **Monday, September 2:** No School (Labor Day)
- **Tuesday, September 3:** First Day of Pre-K

## ITEMS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

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

| Item                              | Board Direction  | Status   |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| Final Tax Rate Information        | Several members are interested in hearing more about what happens to the tax rate and CLA after the veto session and after final numbers are received from the city.   | The board received an update over the summer with tax rate updates. More information is included in this report.   |
| Policy B5 Harassment of Employees | The board requested some changes to the draft policy, including removing the specific name of the HR official and the removal of references to supervisory unions. Additionally, one board member requested to see the Notice of Nondiscrimination in a future packet.   | Edits to the B5 policy were made and this is now back for a second reading and approval for adoption. The Notice of Nondiscrimination is added in this month's packet. |
| Potential Resolution              | Member Isaiah presented progress on the Gun Safety Resolution. He suggested that a statement with much of the resolution language instead be adopted by the board. Board President Robert stated that he is happy to bring the conversation back to a future meeting and that members can communicate directly with Isaiah with feedback on the changes in language and whether a statement is a better route than a resolution. | This is a board-only matter, but the administration continues to be supportive of the specific measures included in the proposed resolution.                           |
| Other items                       | Several other items were suggested to be covered during the board retreat both during this meeting and previous ones.  | Several items were added to the board retreat agenda at the request of the board.  |
|                                   |  |  |

## 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.