

Meeting Notes

What: West Hartford Public Schools
Board of Education and Executive Team Retreat
When: Monday, July 20, 2009; 4:00 p.m.-8:30 p.m.
Where: Board of Education Conference Room
Who: Board of Education Members: *[insert names with appropriate titles]*
WHPS Executive Team Members: *[insert names with appropriate titles]*

Meeting Outline

1. Opening remarks
2. Retreat focus
3. Meeting norms
4. 1999 and 2020
5. Extra! Extra! Read All About It!
6. Dinner break
7. What Needs to be True?
8. Where Do We Go From Here?

Retreat Focus

In pre-meeting conversations with the facilitator, participants suggested that the following items be discussed:

- Articulating a broad vision for our schools in the coming decade.
- Identifying the opportunities that the board and administration most want to seize in order to achieve that vision.
- Determining "new and improved" ways that the board and administration can work as a team to seize those opportunities.
- Agreeing on we can remain equally focused on solving problems and seizing opportunities.
- How will we continue the conversation after tonight?

In pre-meeting conversations with the facilitator, participants expressed following as reasons for holding this retreat:

- We need a cohesive vision to guide us.
- Imagining the possibilities is inspiring.
- There is so much change happening we need to stay ahead of the curve, anticipate what might happen and be prepared
- We need a vision and values framework within which to make day-to-day decisions.
- It's easy to get caught up in the crisis of the day and lose sight of the big picture. The urgent can crowd out the important.
- Each of has to be able to articulate what we stand for as a school system when we are communicating with our various publics.
- **We rarely have the time or the setting for in-depth conversations about the big issues.**

- It's good to take a step back and talk about why we serve and what we imagine the outcome of our service will be. **What's our legacy?**

In pre-meeting conversations with the facilitator, participants named the following as issues to avoid when engaging in the type of discussion being held at this retreat:

- Visioning discussions can be speculative to the point of pointless
- The big issues and ideas are "loaded". It is hard to put our thoughts, feelings, and opinions about them into words. It is hard to talk about them without offending someone.

- We can dream, but we have to be grounded in reality. After all, a vision that can't be implemented is just a hallucination. **The radical that can't complete the revolution is just a vandal.**
- Developing a **shared vision** requires time and a careful process. We are in the early stages. We need to be realistic about what we can finish in one session and committed to continuing the conversation.
- Our perspectives are important, but we also have to consider the big issues and ideas from the different perspectives of the many different constituencies in our town.
- We are temporary stewards and must be careful not to impose our vision on those that follow us in ways that unduly constrain them.

Participants Agreed on the Following List of Meeting Norms

- Be fully present.
- Take your turn to speak and make sure everyone else does, too.
- Listen! Focus more on understanding than on being understood.
- Stay on topic. Use a "parking lot" to capture issues and ideas to be discussed at another time.
- Watch the time. Move on.
- Avoid navel gazing.
- Don't turn the meeting into a complaint session.
- Good minds differ. Disagree without being disagreeable.
- Confront the issues--not the people.
- Confidentiality and trust.
- Technology free zone.
- Have fun!

Exercise 1: Focus for Tonight

Recognizing that we cannot cover all of the suggested topics this evening, which topics do you want to put on the table and which will you leave for a future meeting?

The following topics were suggested. Those with a ** and in *bold face italics* were chosen.

- Racial imbalance
- State or Fed or Town of West Hartford: How we finance education in this state
- Expansion → year, day, number of hours in day
- ****What is our legacy? What was accomplished on our watch?**
- ****What does success look like?**
- ****What does a graduate leave WHPS with? A vision of our graduates**
 - Easy to measure (test score). Not easy to measure but important and need ways to measure (character, ethics, etc.)
- ****Behaviors follow beliefs – What do we stand for?**
- Demographics and their meaning for the schools
- How will we make \$ budget decisions when choices need to be made and we have \$ and more priorities
- Overcoming misperceptions: test scores and number of administrators
- Communicating what we do
- **Speak as one voice**
- Get an accurate message out
- Better listening to all town constituents, not just parents
- Message→ include the "we meet children where they are" message
- Value proposition of education 20 years ago versus today versus tomorrow

Exercise 2: Looking Back

Think of something that is a reality today, but that you could not have imagined 10 years ago.

- Communication technology – speed
 - Info narrowly focused but more of it
 - Perception of WH as stuck in past
 - Accountability for schools
 - Use of data
 - Punitive nature of account
 - Unfairness of it all
 - Virtual classrooms
 - High school degree was the end – now not at all

Exercise 3: What do you think will have a major impact on WHPS in 10 years? What external factors will be influencing what we do and how we do it? Internal factors?

- Changing way we communicate and how it impacts teaching
- Teach more with new tools and techniques using the arts, video, etc.
- Kids produce videos rather than papers
- Kids values re: reading
- Learning/teaching will be more visual
- What will the interest be in neighborhood schools? What's the role?
- Schools as community centers
- Distance learning
- School role in community, life, development
- Increase numbers of schools without walls
- Schools → socializing for purposes of learning and social networking
- What is the role of teachers? What skills will be needed to be a teacher?
- Neighborhood schools could be more important as social community
- International connections

Exercise 4: Imagine that is 2020. You are a journalist and have been assigned to write a story about the school district that sets the standard for every other school in the nation--the West Hartford Public Schools. What makes WHPS so special?

- Still a lighthouse district in music and arts
- No achievement gap
- Embracing technology
 - Online courses for expanded offering
 - Enhanced communication with parents; WEBcam in classrooms
 - Kindles will replace paperbacks
- Broad offerings extra-curricular, including ties to corporate sector
- A school district for all children where every child grows
- YouTube report
- Firm commitment to each child maximum opportunities and abilities
- Global citizens
- Access to tools they need
- Together with parents promote values
- Measures things that matter
- Graduation Speech: "I know what it means to be successful"
- I watched a YouTube production where everyone made a contribution
- Students who were not likely to make it 12 years, made it!
- Importance of helping others
- Confidence to start something new
- Perform: communicate
- Work with others who know and learn in ways different from

- Share talents
- People grow to appreciate their lives and others
- Saw a kid who couldn't do anything in 2nd grade do it all in senior year

Exercise 5: In order for the vision described in the news articles to be true, what will WHPS need to do, have, change, delete, maintain, etc.?

- Much more and better communication with many constituencies using many different tools
- Conversations with the community
 - Budget forum is a good example of the kind of thing we need to do
 - School-based communications – targeted communication to smaller groups
 - Structured “community conversations:” Trained facilitators – Maybe we could hold one in early 2010 on racial imbalance
- Listening → Blog
- There are groups/stakeholders that we’re not sufficiently engaged with → business, seniors, realtors
- Community officer as part of the administrative staff
- Publicize good news (press person) → e.g., board awards
- Media training for staff, principals
- Help the community care about the things we’ve said we care about
- Mobilize the community
- Solve problems/issues
 - State mandates
 - Achievement gaps
- School district for every child where they are
 - EDC report
 - Gifted and Talented
 - Focus commitment on the “Forgotten middle kids”
- Board meeting agendas are focused on either end of the spectrum “the extremes.” Is it creating a misperception? Or is true?
- Individualized plans for students draws parents in
- We are creating the perception by using _____ why not talk about a _____
- People can’t talk about 10,000 kids so we “bucket kids”
- The notion of every child having an IEP
- We need to be able to measure what really matters.

collaborative skills	arts appreciation
critical thinking	social intelligence
creative	Ethics
confidence	Leadership
sort through info	team work
resolve conflict	

- We provide experiences that build and demonstrate these qualities and values
- How tell our community (all ages) – convince them of the values and importance of these qualities
- Modeling these things – need people who model this
- Ties to vocation and business
- Public cares about extra-curriculum: Mock Trial
- Teaching community question...
- Are kids typecast and opportunities are foreclosed
- Need to have the staff, quality role models
- Support for CHANGE → culture change. We need to create a culture that expects and wants change
- Pay for performance, need to be there in 2020
- Not a better time than now to act
- Leading and managing change

- District improvement plan, etc.
- “Slow is fast” – we make the changes stick; use good data, focus on results and engagement
- Find and celebrate the good things
- Use good things to force bad things out
- 1980s hired music teachers -- long commitment
- Bigger challenge is the community’s resistance to change (e.g., start time and block scheduling)
- How do we use technology in change initiative?
- In 2020 will we have paperless classrooms?
- HS students will have that experience in college; we need to prepare them for that
- Incubators
- Magnet schools
- Technology support and training for teachers, we need more, focus more tech training for adults than kids
- Socioeconomic access issues
- Social networking

Exercise 6: How will we use what you learned tonight? How will we keep this conversation going and take it to the next level of depth and specificity?

- Schedule the next retreats
 - Monday, November 9, 2009, 5:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m. Include both outgoing and incoming members and the executive team
 - Planning Group: Clare, Lib, Terry, Eileen, Karen
 - Hold a meeting to plan the Nov. retreat Friday, 9/18/, 8:30.-10:00 a.m.
 - > Planning group will put together a proposal and send it to the whole group
 - > Whole group respond and shape
 - > Important to allow ample time for communication
 - Monday, January 11, 2010 – Vision and planning, 5:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m.
 - Planning group TBD after elections
- Share tonight’s work with new members immediately after elections
 - Jack, Bruce, Tim, Diane, Karen, Eileen
- Need facilitator
- Document from tonight
- Tim will lead group response

“Parking Lot”: Important issues to be discussed at another time

- **Very important (for this group) to have an in-depth conversation about racial imbalance. We should schedule a session devoted to only this topic**
- Once we have defined what our message is, we have to determine how to communicate it to all of the townspeople. We need to use modern communications messages, strategies and tools.
- We need a better understanding of the relationships between WHPS/town and the state and federal government; what it is and what we want it to be