

**MINUTES OF THE WINDHAM SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

255th MEETING

The Windham School District Board of Trustees met in session on Thursday, December 10, 2009, at the Hilton Austin Hotel in Austin, Texas.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Oliver Bell, Chairman
Tom Mechler, Vice Chairman
Leopoldo (Leo) Vasquez, III, Secretary
Eric Gambrell
Janice Harris Lord
J. David Nelson
Terrell McCombs
Carmen Villanueva-Hiles

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

Pastor C. L. Jackson

WINDHAM STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Debbie Roberts, Superintendent
Marjie Haynes

**TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL
JUSTICE STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Brad Livingston
Bryan Collier
Melinda Bozarth

CONVENED

Oliver Bell, Chairman, called the meeting of the Windham School District (WSD) Board of Trustees (Board) to order on Thursday, December 10, 2009, at 1:09 p.m. in accordance with Chapter 551 of the Texas Government Code, the *Open Meetings Act*. A quorum was present and the 255th meeting of the Board was declared open. During the regular session, the Board conducted business from the agenda posted in the Texas Register.

The Chairman reported the Board was committed to providing the opportunity for public presentations on topics posted on the meeting agenda, as well as public comment on issues within its jurisdiction as provided in Board Rule 300.1. Persons interested in providing presentations at the meeting were required to complete a registration card and submit it at least 10 minutes prior to the meeting's posted start time. As no cards were received prior to the required deadline, the Board would not hear public presentations on posted agenda topics.

Chairman Bell recognized Kyle Mitchell from the Governor's Office and thanked him for his continued support.

RECOGNITIONS

Chairman Bell explained the Chairman's Fitness Challenge, which began in September, will be broken into four quarters to cover the full fiscal year. The idea is to challenge and encourage employees to incorporate daily physical activities and healthy choices into their personal lives. The first quarter event was called "Walk the Perimeter of TDCJ," which actually mirrors the "Walk Across Texas" Program. During this first quarter six-week event, participating employees figuratively walked around the TDCJ perimeter approximately 200 times (equaling 165,384 miles). Chairman Bell recognized WSD for recording the second highest number of miles walked (8,068 miles) by a group during this first quarter challenge. A plaque was presented to the WSD for its efforts.

DISCUSSION, CONSIDERATION AND POSSIBLE ACTION REGARDING CONSENT ITEMS

Chairman Bell called the Board's attention to the Consent Items on the agenda, which consisted of the minutes of the October 7, 2009, meeting.

Chairman Bell asked if there were any comments, objections or amendments to the Consent Items. Noting there were none, he stated the Consent Items were approved as submitted.

PRESENTATION ON CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (CTE) EXPANSION

Debbie Roberts, Superintendent, explained that WSD received funds during the last legislative session to expand the CTE program. Over the last three months, WSD staff have been working diligently to identify classes and locations for these expansion programs. Ms. Roberts asked Marjie Haynes, Director of Instruction, to update the Board on the expansion plans.

Ms. Haynes, providing a PowerPoint presentation, explained WSD vocational classes are taught six hours a day, for approximately six months, running 600 clock-hours in length. Students are trained to entry-level industry standards. The knowledge components of the trade are taught through a classroom approach and the skills components through actual hands-on training in a shop setting. Ms. Haynes displayed a listing of the various trades that are taught and explained that each year WSD conducts an effectiveness study to make sure offenders are gaining employment in the trades taught. WSD teachers are certified teachers and are required to be industry certified in the trade they teach.

WSD is required to conduct an evaluation of its vocational programs each year. The study for 2009 was recently completed and submitted to the Legislative Budget Board (LBB). This is the fourth year of the study and each year the study has indicated:

- Completing vocational training while incarcerated, offenders exhibit higher initial employment rates, earn higher wages, and exhibit higher job retention rates than offenders who did not receive vocational training.
- Working in an occupation related to the training and obtaining industry certification appear to enhance job retention.

Ms. Haynes displayed a graphical illustration of employment results for the past three years. The graph indicates that the percentage of offenders who gained employment within one year of release has consistently been higher for the offenders who completed vocational training. The graph indicates the employment rate has dropped from 69 percent in 2007, to 62 percent in 2008, and to 59 percent in 2009. This appears to be a reflection of the current economic crisis nationwide, particularly the record high unemployment rates across the nation.

Currently there are approximately 39,000 offenders in need of vocational training. More than 9,800 are on the waiting list for a specific trade. The capacity of the CTE program is limited. On any given day, approximately 3,400 offenders are enrolled in vocational programming.

In 2007, WSD surveyed the units and identified more than 35 empty shops systemwide. It also found CTE classes could be added at some facilities without an increase in correctional officer staffing. Based on the number of offenders in need of vocational programming, and armed with the results of the CTE effectiveness studies, Ms. Roberts asked the legislature this past session for additional funding to cover 54 CTE teachers. The legislature approved 27 positions and WSD is in the process of collaborating with the TDCJ to determine which trades to add and where.

Ms. Haynes explained that expanding the vocational programming is a complex issue. Several items must be considered before starting a program on a specific unit. Offender interest is generally reflected by the waiting list for the specific trades. A table was displayed that depicted current waiting lists. Welding, Truck Driving and Electrical trades are the most popular courses in terms of offender interest. There are currently six Welding programs and only one Truck Driving program. Both of these trades are very expensive to set up and operate.

Ms. Haynes displayed a slide that depicted the trades that WSD is preparing to increase through the CTE expansion. The five programs with the largest waiting lists are included in the expansion. Other trades are also being considered based on shop availability. As some locations do not have a shop, making it necessary to select a trade that can operate in an academic classroom (a clean-shop trade). Computer Maintenance Technician and Drafting are good examples of clean-shop trades. In addition, as one facility has a paint booth that is not being utilized, plans are underway to add a Painting & Decorating class at that unit. WSD is also working with the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation to see if requirements can be met to add Cosmetology for female offenders and Barbering for the male offenders. With the help of the TDCJ, two buildings have been located that might be suitable locations; however, one would need to be remodeled which might prove cost prohibitive.

During the 81st Legislative Session, the legislature also approved funds to allow WSD to pay the fees associated with industry certification. Until now, the fees have been the responsibility of the offender. The process is underway to develop eligibility criteria and begin implementation in January. WSD is working out new payment procedures with the industry certification organizations and is pleased to have this opportunity to offer industry certification testing to more offenders.

Tom Mechler asked if WSD has any data that shows the people that have been through vocational training and have gained employment within one year of release are making more money and thus paying more taxes. Ms. Haynes responded that she did not know about tax data

but figures are available on salaries. Mr. Mechler felt this information would be beneficial to share with the legislature as it would show the return that is coming from this training investment. Ms. Roberts replied that this type of information is included in the effectiveness study that WSD submits to the LBB each year. Ms. Haynes added that the LBB also publishes a copy of the effectiveness study on their website.

Mr. Mechler asked if WSD has ever thought about partnering with a trucking company to provide trucks and instructors in order to provide truck driving training for the offenders. Ms. Haynes responded that WSD is hoping to double its efforts with Lee College for the Truck Driving program but as far as contacting companies for assistance, she was not aware of that happening. She added that companies have donated engines to the vocational programs in the past. Terrell McCombs added that he thought it was a good idea to consider partnerships in all areas. If a large company could be identified that could assist WSD across the state, that would be great, but a smaller company that could help locally, could also be very beneficial to all concerned. He encouraged WSD to pursue this idea.

Janice Lord stated she thought the inclusion of a Cosmetology program would be very beneficial to the female offenders. Regarding working statistics on released offenders, she noted that the parole offices should have information on who is working and who is not. Ms. Haynes responded that WSD has found that some parole offices keep better records than others. She added that the wage information has been obtained from the Texas Workforce Commission in the past.

Chairman Bell stated WSD may want to kick-off a corporate volunteer initiative to see how they could benefit from that type of collaboration. As far as the wage reporting, there are four divisions in particular, where employment information crosses organizational lines: WSD, Rehabilitative Programs, Reintegration and Reentry, and Parole. There should be a way to capture a significant portion, if not all of this data.

Ms. Roberts stated these were good suggestions. WSD has been trying to get information back from employers on how the offenders are doing. WSD would also like the opportunity to ask former offenders how to improve on the training received and if there are other areas in which improvement can be identified. It is difficult to make those contacts so WSD is developing strategies for contacting employers who are hiring former students to get feedback from them.

Attachment – PowerPoint Presentation

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT **2008-2009 Windham Campus Accountability Results**

Ms. Roberts reported that at the end of each school year, every WSD campus receives a yearly ranking of Exemplary, Recognized, Acceptable, or Needs Improvement. That ranking is determined by the percentage of students who make adequate yearly progress. The percentage of students making adequate yearly progress must be at least 57 percent for an acceptable ranking, 67 percent for recognized, and 77 percent for exemplary.

Two years ago, WSD asked the Board to increase the adequate yearly progress standard from a .4 grade equivalent gain for prison offenders and .6 grade equivalent gain for state jail and transfer offenders, to .5 and .7 grade equivalent gains respectively. That same year, WSD also asked the Board to raise the threshold for the percentage of offenders making adequate yearly

progress for each ranking category by two percentage points. For example, WSD requested the threshold for an acceptable ranking be increased from 55 percent of offenders making adequate yearly progress to 57 percent. Those changes were requested because that year, 72 percent of all WSD campuses were either recognized or exemplary, and only one campus was rated as needing improvement. In order to continue to improve student performance, the bar needed to be raised. The Board responded by approving the recommendations and raising the average yearly progress standard by a tenth of a grade level, and by increasing the percentage of offenders making adequate yearly progress by two percentage points for each of the ranking categories.

As expected with the increase in standards, the results for the 2007-2008 school year appeared much worse than the previous year, with 14 campuses being identified as needing improvement, and only 39 percent being identified as recognized or exemplary. Staff was optimistic about the 2008-2009 school year because of the belief that teachers would be challenged by the new goals and that student progress scores would continue to increase to meet the new thresholds.

At the beginning of the 2008-2009 school year, WSD was concerned how Hurricane Ike and the systemwide lock downs would impact school attendance hours and how those events would affect student performance. The results for the 2008-2009 school year however show some improvement. The number of schools identified as needing improvement decreased from 14 to nine, while the number of acceptable campuses increased by five. The percentage of exemplary and recognized campuses held constant at 39 percent. Considering the obstacles that were faced during that year and the interruption in class attendance, WSD was pleased with those results and expected continued improvement this year.

Windham continues to work on adding CTEs as well as life skills programs into the accountability mix. WSD is in the process of gathering data and establishing baseline numbers for those areas and hopes to have those factored into the accountability ranking in the next couple of years.

REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN, WSD BOARD

1. Summary of Vocational/Learning Activities for Offenders

Chairman Bell stated the role of the system should be to help people, not just lock them up. Participation improves opportunities for offenders to better themselves. As participation in WSD programs is a privilege, good behavior by the offender is important.

During the 2008-2009 school year, more than 87,000 offenders received educational services through WSD. During that same period, 5,069 GEDs were awarded, which is about 17 percent of all GEDs throughout Texas. Approximately 69.4 percent of offenders released in FY 2008 participated in at least one education program while incarcerated. Vocational certificates were issued to 5,585 offenders.

As noted earlier, generally ex-offenders who receive vocational training display higher initial employment rates, earn higher wages and exhibit higher job retention rates than those who do not receive vocational training.

2. Urban League Report on Correctional Education

The Prison Reentry Institute at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and the Urban League hosted a reentry roundtable in 2008 to examine education during incarceration and reentry, and to identify programmatic/policy directions. The roundtable cited several programs that exist to meet the need for educational services of offenders – Adult Basic Education, Adult Secondary Education, Post-secondary Education, Special Education, Vocational Education, and Life Skills Education. All of which are offered by WSD.

Components of effective correctional education include: proper student assessment and placement, well-trained and well-supported teachers, appropriate use of technology, and effective incentive structure. Again, all of these components are already incorporated and utilized in WSD programs and services.

The Roundtable confirms the belief that correctional education has a positive effect on reducing recidivism and on increasing employment opportunities, levels and wages of ex-offenders.

3. State Employee Charitable Campaign

Each year during the months of September and October, state employees are given the opportunity to donate to their favorite charities through payroll deductions or one-time contributions. In addition to making personal donations, employees are able to coordinate events to collect further contributions. These fund-raising events can include food sales, car washes, silent auctions, and tournaments.

For the 2009 campaign, preliminary totals are in, and TDCJ employees collected and contributed more than \$880,000 to charities either through cash donations or payroll deductions. The WSD Administration itself had a record year, collecting more than \$15,000 of that grand total.

4. Chairman's Fitness Challenge

As noted during the recognition phase of this meeting, participants for the first quarter of the Chairman's Fitness Challenge figuratively walked 165,384 miles or 200 times around the "Perimeter of TDCJ." This was a tremendous effort and Chairman Bell expressed his appreciation to all employees who participated. The second challenge, "Maintain, No Gain," is now underway. This challenge emphasizes the importance of maintaining overall wellness during the holiday season. The third quarter challenge will highlight the annual Texas Round-Up, Governor Perry's statewide fitness initiative.

For the last two years, TDCJ, to include Windham, has been awarded third place in the Texas Round-Up for employee participation amongst state agencies with 5,000+ employees. Chairman Bell challenged employees to beat the Department of Transportation and the Department of Public Safety for the Governor's Cup. There was 20.04 percent employee participation in last year's Round-Up; only 6.2 percent more would have won the cup. That is definitely obtainable.

Chairman Bell urged the WSD leadership to begin promoting the challenge. With WSD and TDCJ working together, the cup can be achieved.

5. Appreciation to Staff

Chairman Bell thanked everyone for the outpouring of support that had been shown to him and his family after the death of his son.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Chairman Bell adjourned the 255th meeting of the WSD Board of Trustees at 2:02 p.m.

**Signature on File*

Chairman

**Signature on File*

Secretary