

Windham School District
Board of Trustees
264th Meeting



Minutes

June 10, 2011
Austin, Texas

WINDHAM SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**Doubletree Hotel
6505 North IH-35
Austin, Texas 78752
Phoenix North**

**June 10, 2011
11:30 AM – 12:00 PM**

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Call to Order

Convene Windham School District (WSD) Board of Trustees (Board)

I. Regular Session

- A. Discussion, Consideration, and Possible Action Regarding Consent Items
 - 1. Minutes of the April 8, 2011, WSD Board Meeting
 - 2. Personal Property Donations
 - 3. Excused Absences

- B. Presentation on the Lane Murray Excellence in Teaching Process

- C. Superintendent's Report – 82nd Legislative Update

- D. Report from the Chairman, WSD Board
 - 1. WSD Assessment and the Board of Trustees Special Purpose Committee
 - 2. Offender Testimony, Impact of WSD
 - 3. Chairman's Fitness League

Adjourn WSD Board

The WSD Board may discuss and/or take action on any of the items posted on this meeting agenda. The WSD Board may also convene into Executive Session on any of these matters when attorney-client privilege is warranted.

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

264th MEETING

The Windham School District Board of Trustees met in session on Friday, June 10, 2011, at the DoubleTree Hotel in Austin, Texas.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Oliver Bell, Chairman
Tom Mechler, Vice Chairman
Leopoldo (Leo) Vasquez, III, Secretary
Judge Larry Gist
Eric Gambrell
Terrell McCombs
J. David Nelson
Carmen Villanueva-Hiles

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: Janice Harris Lord

WINDHAM STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT: Debbie Roberts, Superintendent
Linda Goerdel
Bambi Kiser
Kevin Ainsworth
Susan Norris
Tim Simon

**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 Friday, June 10, 2011, at 11:42 a.m. in accordance with Chapter 551 of the Texas Government Code, the *Open Meetings Act*. During the regular session, the board conducted business from the agenda posted in the Texas Register. A quorum was present and the 264th meeting of the Board was declared open.

Chairman Bell recognized County Judge Dale Sturgeon from Jones County, Angela Isaack from the Legislative Budget Board, Marsha McLane from Representative Jerry Madden's office, and Chelsea Bucholtz from the Governor's Office.

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 Rule 300.1. Persons interested in providing presentations at the meeting were required to complete a registration card and submit it at least ten 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.

**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 April 8, 2011, meeting, personal property donations and excused absences for Ms. Hiles who was unable to attend the February meeting and Mr. Gambrell who was unable to attend the April meeting both due to personal business.

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 THE LANE MURRAY EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING PROCESS

Kevin Ainsworth, WSD Gulf Coast Regional Administrator, and Bambi Kiser, WSD Public Information Officer, gave a PowerPoint presentation on the Lane Murray Excellence in Teaching Process.

Mr. Ainsworth and Ms. Kiser explained that Windham educators meet the unique challenge of using education to change the lives of thousands of convicted felons on 90 sites within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. These teachers represent some of the best correctional educators in the nation, and it is a privilege to honor them every two years through the Lane Murray Excellence in Teaching Award Process.

When WSD began this effort in 2005, the award was first called "WSD Teacher of the Year." However in 2009, at the suggestion of Chairman Bell, it was renamed after Dr. Lane Murray, the first superintendent of the Windham School District, who pioneered the school-district-within-the-state-prison-system concept. Dr. Murray recognized the need for an innovative, nontraditional approach to the education of incarcerated adults. With no model to follow, she developed a system that began with eight instructors, and has now grown to more than 805 teaching positions.

The award's two-year selection process begins with peer nominations from WSD campuses, culminating in the recipient being recognized at a meeting of the Board. Last year, 79 nominations were submitted from schools throughout the state. Each nominee's name is accompanied by peer comments and autobiographies explaining why the individual chose a career in teaching and correctional education.

The campus nominations are sent to WSD regional offices. There, a committee of WSD personnel screens the responses, letters, and references, selecting the top three regional nominees through a scoring system. The top three teachers in each region, a total of 12 statewide, are then honored as "Regional Semi-Finalists." They are recognized at staff development meetings and other events, and presented with a certificate of appreciation.

The same regional committees that screened the campus nominees schedule classroom observations of the region's semi-finalists. They visit the teachers, observe them teaching a class of offenders, and score each using the Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS) document. Guidelines are exacting, and specific actions, behaviors, and results are sought by the evaluation team.

After the evaluation of the semi-finalists, the regional committees select a top teacher from each region and submit those regional finalists to the WSD's Excellence in Teaching Steering Committee. The committee currently consists of Ms. Kiser, Mr. Ainsworth, Counselor Trainer Susan Norris, and Estelle Unit Principal Luann Pickett. This steering committee has the privilege of taking the selection process into its final phase and observing some of the best correctional educators in the state.

The committee visits each finalist in their teaching environment to observe the relationship and rapport of the teacher and the students during a 45-minute lesson. The PDAS is again used for scoring the finalist with the committee looking for unique, well-honed teaching.

During the final phase of the process this year, the steering committee visited Sara Maxwell at the Crain Unit, Pamela Gibson at the Ware Unit, Cathy Farris at the Estelle Unit, and Delores Able at the Terrell Unit.

In addition to observing the finalists in class, the committee conducts an informal, scored interview with each finalist. The finalists are given an opportunity to express themselves concerning their teaching styles, goals, professional accomplishments, and the importance of correctional education.

After the four finalist observations, a new Lane Murray Excellence in Teaching Award is selected and announced; this occurs every other summer. The winner and three remaining finalists are then honored with an introduction to the board in the fall. Their WSD regional administrators and principals, TDCJ wardens, and personal friends and family are invited to attend. News releases are distributed, and the WSD web site will post an overview of the process and honorees.

The winner, finalists, and semi-finalists become a part of a growing cohort of Windham's best educators. They are called on to lead WSD teachers in district staff development meetings, speak at professional education conferences, make presentations to the public, be interviewed by local media, and even testify before members of the state legislature.

The Lane Murray Excellence in Teaching Award Initiative is not just about recognizing the top correctional educators in the state or even the legacy of Dr. Lane Murray; it's about honoring the work of all Windham teachers who enter prison each day and change lives. It is about recognizing the excellent work of teachers who make Windham School District a national leader in correctional education.

Ms. Roberts thanked the steering committee for their work and dedication to this initiative.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Ms. Roberts stated that WSD received a 27% reduction in funding for the upcoming biennium. WSD spent the last couple of weeks working on a plan to implement that reduction. It is anticipated that the WSD will eliminate around 265 positions. The challenge is to take advantage of vacancies so that the fewest staff possible will be disrupted while, at the same time, maintaining programs at those facilities where educational programming will have the greatest impact.

During the next fiscal year, WSD will participate in a Sunset Advisory Commission review and will conduct an intensive recidivism study to analyze the impact of its programs on both recidivism and employment. The WSD also has three new appropriation riders that will take a significant amount of time and attention in order to implement. Ms. Roberts noted that next year will be very challenging.

Ms. Roberts assured the Board that WSD staff remains committed to the district's mission and are convinced that the educational services provided will continue to have a positive impact on public safety.

Chairman Bell stated that a 27% reduction is a considerable size reduction for WSD and he knows the district will make the best effort possible to move forward and try to be as creative as possible to retain the quality of the programs that remain in place. He added that tough decisions must be made and he urged WSD to use care in dealing with staff affected by these decisions.

REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN, WSD BOARD

WSD Assessment and the Board of Trustees Special Purpose Committee

Chairman Bell noted that in late April, he tasked the WSD leadership to take a concerted look at the district's instructional procedures and staffing structures to assess the format and delivery of education services to offenders.

In conjunction, he also established a special purpose committee of the Windham Board of Trustees called the Education Operations Efficiency and Performance Standards Committee. This committee is being chaired by Carmen Hiles, with Janice Lord, Judge Larry Gist and Tom Mechler serving as members. The committee's purpose will be to interface with Ms. Roberts and her leadership team as appropriate to provide oversight, facilitate discussions, and recommend potential strategies for consideration during this assessment process. The committee will explore education delivery strategies that will allow WSD and other diversionary programs to continue the positive influence on recidivism trends. Texas has a 24.7% recidivism rate and this is the best of any large criminal justice system in the country. The committee will take into consideration the recidivism study that Ms. Roberts mentioned as well as the Sunset review in making recommendations relative to WSD's educational services – a process he was titling "WSD Educating for the Future."

Chairman Bell added there is no doubt that a 27% reduction will have an impact on the current educational structure of the district. The challenge will be to implement a plan that will minimize impact on the educational achievements of the students. He noted that the board has great faith in Ms. Roberts and her staff. Difficult operational decisions will be made, but WSD

will be able to overcome this obstacle and, in the end, will remain a school district that is at the forefront of correctional education.

Offender Testimony, Impact of WSD

Sometimes the best way to show the importance of a program is to hear from the individuals who are impacted by it. Chairman Bell read a few excerpts from an offender letter that Ms. Roberts recently received to give inspiration to everyone in the district. It is from a 27 year old offender.

“I dropped out of school in the beginning of sixth grade. I was never good at school, or even interested. I have attended Windham now for about 3 months, and in these 3 short months, I have brought my E.A. scores way up. I qualified for GED testing, which I never imagined, and finished testing this past week.”

“I never would have thought in my wildest dreams that I would look forward to going to school every day and enjoy it like I do...”

“I moved around a lot growing up. And probably went to a couple dozen schools in my life...”

“Of all the schools I have ever been to, Windham is by far the greatest; most productive I have ever been to...”

Chairman Bell expressed the board’s appreciation to Ms. Roberts for her tremendous leadership, and to all WSD staff for their hard work and for making a difference through education. The goal will always be to make the best of the resources available and to have the greatest possible impact on the offenders’ educational experience. Most offenders will return to our communities; they can return improved citizens with the potential to contribute or they can return as a threat to public safety. Education has a positive impact on what most will do on their return. WSD helps keep the eye on education. Chairman Bell expressed appreciation for the support offered by the legislature to help accomplish these goals.

Chairman’s Fitness Challenge

Chairman Bell stated that the third quarter of the Chairman’s Fitness Challenge was once again a success due to the participation and support of the agency’s and the district’s employees. The championship for Division 7, which has been designated to the Windham School District, was won by the Windham Administration with 9,369 points. The Windham Gulf Coast Region placed second and the WSD North Texas Region placing third during this six-week activity. These results, along with the results for the remaining divisions will be posted in the TDCJ *Connections* newsletter.

The fourth quarter challenge, titled Post-Season Training, is underway with reporting for the five-week activity to begin on Monday, June 13. Chairman Bell expressed appreciation for the enthusiasm and continued participation of the board and the staff in this on-going physical fitness challenge.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Chairman Bell adjourned the 264th meeting of the WSD Board of Trustees at 12:09 p.m.

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Chairman

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Secretary

*Signature on File