

Cabinet Report to Boards

Year End Recap

June 2020

Well, it has been a year to remember.

Our year began with a majority of our Leadership Team having been together for three years. That continuity, along with our monthly work together, created an atmosphere of stability, solidarity, and continuous improvement. As the COVID-19 pandemic came into play, we relied heavily on each other and our foundation as a team. All of our previous work allowed us to navigate an extraordinary time with steady leadership.

I want to thank all the board members for their steadfast support. We are a unique Supervisory Union with a variety of operating structures. We work well together.

Included in this year end Cabinet report you will find highlights and updates from our four Directors. They continue to amaze me with their dedication, professionalism, and future planning.

Thank You for a positive, supportive year.

Director of Finance

A year in review from the WCSU business office; district mergers, taking on financials for existing districts, a new chart of accounts, and a new accounting system were the main themes of the year. The **#1 goal** of the business office team was to roll out these changes with the least amount of disruption to our valued employees and to meet all payroll/benefit/reporting requirements. We aligned resources to the payroll process to meet this goal. Other key components to the main themes listed above were:

- Participated in weekly/monthly eFinance Plus training for the business office staff.
- Updated and trained employees on the procurement procedure and accounts payable process.
- Set up Employees to have access to an electronic requisition system.
- Employee Access Center (EAC) set up for 100% of the employees to review compensation and benefits.
- Navigated the unprecedented changes with the onset of COVID-19

Other major improvements/changes to the overall system included:

- Reduced employee complaints **90%** by engaging with a new Third Party Administrator (TPA) for management of all the HRA/HSA benefit accounts.
- Streamlined the benefit module for federal year end processing of 1094B/1095C
- Reduced postage costs with emailed payroll vouchers for direct deposit.
- Working with the Technology Director, secured additional ERATE funding to enhance the wireless access network at the elementary schools.
- Secured funding to upgrade Bio-Mass heating system at LGUHS.

By planning ahead and cross training, we were able to stay nimble this past year and did not replace an open human resource position, instead we moved staff within the business office. Thereby **reducing expenses by a .50 FTE.**

- ❖ For FY 20 we had asked the WCSU board to spend 86k of the fund balance to hire a Director of Operations, we were able to mitigate most of the 86K with the HR reduction.

Looking ahead to Fiscal Year 2021; tightening the existing system, roll out of a substitute management system and electronic timesheet process are of high priority. In FY 2020 we put additional resources in the payroll process, this year our goal is to work with employees and vendors to create efficiencies in the approximate **10m** of accounts payable that is processed within the **6** districts. We will accomplish this goal by:

- Working with the Director of Operation to streamline purchasing within the building operation department.
- Coordinating with vendors to reduce invoicing to the district vs school level.
- Getting 80%-90% of our staff to use the electronic requisition system and to follow the procurement process. (While most employees were trained, many have resisted the change from paper)

With the **additional reduction of .50** in the business office, the sub management and electronic timesheet rollouts will be vital to maintain the same level of service in FY 21. key elements include;

- ❖ **Reduction of 76+ paper timesheets** that are handled by no less than 4 people to an electronic approval system and fully integrated with the payroll system.
- ❖ The identification of efficiencies in HR by working with the team and continuing to cross train.

This year of momentous change would not have been possible without the deep commitment and support from the Windham Central board, thank you!

Director of Curriculum

Academic Proficiency

Director of Curriculum & Instruction

Academic Support Team (AST): This was the first year for the WCSU AST. The AST focused primarily on math and literacy instruction in the elementary schools with some support for the middle school in mathematics. The team participated in several professional development training to improve and refine their skills, including attending the Keys to Literacy Coach training. The team supported the work of classroom teachers through intervention and coaching, provided systematic, research-based instruction to students based on LCAS data, facilitated data meetings and worked with teachers during grade level meetings. The AST met regularly throughout the year to review data, share instructional strategies, and plan for intervention. During the time of remote learning, the AST provided intervention directly to students, co-teaching, coaching for teachers, and videos, tutorials, and hands-on activities, including creating Academic Kits for families.

Grade Level Meetings: Fall grade level meetings (PK, K-2, 3-5) were completed in October. The GLM focused on early literacy practices, tools and resources, Comprehension and Fluency routines for older students, and extensions of the Keys to Literacy comprehension routines. Teachers also had the opportunity to look at their class data from the WTW spelling inventory and work with a literacy coach to evaluate this data. Unfortunately, the spring grade level meetings were unable to happen this year.

Data Meetings: Data meetings were held at each school after the fall and winter benchmark assessments. AST members supported the work of each school's data meetings and conducted grade level and class specific meetings to discuss and analyze student data. As part of the Local Comprehensive Assessment System (LCAS) interventionists also track student growth using progress monitoring tools.

Other Accomplishments from C&I: LCAS revised and updated with more information and support for tiered instruction; Social Studies K-12 Scope & Sequence created & adopted; New Teacher Orientation; Development of the WCSU AST team; Covid19 website with teacher and student resources

Personalized Learning

Director of Curriculum & Instruction

Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS): The LCAS has provided a roadmap for MTSS for academics. The C&I office led elementary teachers and new teachers through the tiered supports that are outlined in the LCAS. The AST provides tiered academic supports for students, including during a remote learning environment. The Leadership Team reviewed the 2019 MTSS Field Guide and has action steps in the Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP) to continue to enhance this work throughout the SU.

Personalized Learning: Through the grants, the C&I office will be able to support the Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements (PBGR) work at the high school. Work on PBGR is a highlight of the district and high school CIP. The work of the AST and the specific requirements outlined in the LCAS ensure a focus on personalized learning continues throughout the SU.

High Quality Staffing

Director of Curriculum & Instruction

Professional Development (PD): The WCSU participated in 5 district wide PD days this year: Keys to Literacy (K-5), UPENN Literacy Strategies (6-12), PreKindergarten Instruction, and Trauma Informed Schools & Mindfulness (all). Additional PD opportunities in early literacy instruction, Keys coaching, Spelling Analysis, Fluency Oriented Reading, Bridges Math Intervention, and data analysis were offered this year.

Leadership Team (LT): The work of the LT was guided by the SU CIP. The team consistently uses its time together to assess district goals, implement actions, and assess our work and progress as a team. The team also reviews classroom instruction together, shares feedback, and calibrates their responses to instruction. The LT participated in PD on Employee Reviews and Hazing, Harassment and Bullying. Some members of the LT also attended the Talking About Teaching Conference together this fall.

Mentoring: The WCSU Mentoring Program had another successful year. The mentors provided support for the 34 new teachers through small group, individual and whole group mentoring. Topics of this year's full meetings included PD on the Supervision & Evaluation system, Special Education & 504 services, LCAS, K-8 Assessment tools and Classroom Management scenarios and responses.

Safe, Healthy Schools

Director of Curriculum & Instruction

Trauma Informed Schools: Our WCSU continued its commitment to become a community of Trauma Informed Schools. In addition to the district wide PD work with Dave Melnick, our trauma Catalyst group met monthly to help guide the work of our SU in collaboration with the work of the LT, including the LT's annual climate surveys to staff, students and families.

Positive Behavior Interventions & Support (PBIS): Three schools in our SU are PBIS schools and have access to the BEST/Act 230 grant. The grant provides funding for PD opportunities as well as behavior support coaching for individual schools.

Hazing, Harassment & Bullying (HHB): In addition to the LT professional development on HHB, the C&I office provided individualized support to schools on an as-needed basis.

Financial Efficiencies

Director of Curriculum & Instruction

Grants: The Director of C&I manages the programmatic portion of the Consolidated Federal Program (CFP) grant in conjunction with the Director of Finance. The Director also writes and manages the BEST /ACT 230 grants and manages the REAP grants for our small schools.

Director of Special Education

This year has flown by and has been full of some recent, well, let's call them "interesting" experiences that are hopefully unique, as in "never happening again!"

We began the year strong with all systems ready to go, staff prepared, and beautiful collaboration with general education teachers, Principals, Academic Support Teachers, and the whole special education crew. Systems worked beautifully and over the early months, several students were able to transition from being on IEPs due to their increase in skills and reduction for need of specialized instruction. It was fascinating to see all gears working together successfully through our Multi Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and I am eager to get back to that place in the fall.

As the year progressed, we analyzed data and continued to modify systems to ensure students were able to access their educational programs. As each situation emerged, our experienced team collaboratively worked through to develop solutions that further enhanced students' experiences and learning. **The Special Education team has continued to work on alignment for equity, diagnostic and prescriptive intervention, and have participated in many training opportunities with the Academic Support Team and general education teachers.** We also worked to create staff departments by school level (early childhood, elementary and intermediate, middle school and high school). This allowed for staff department meetings to hone in on specific, relevant information and skill building.

Our Early Childhood Special Education team has done a wonderful job determining eligibility of students as well as providing screenings for students and support for classroom teachers in reaching all of their students. **In several cases, students who had received early intervention were determined not to be eligible for a school-aged IEP due to the growth they had achieved.** Helping students gain skills quickly is our goal.

Our Social Emotional Team has also worked collaboratively with the Catalyst Group and mental health team to support students and staff throughout the year and **have increased offerings and plannings in light of COVID-19.**

We continued working toward preparation for Act 173 and implementation of District Management Groups' recommendations. At this point, it appears that Act 173 will be delayed an additional year which will provide us with additional time to continue this preparation.

I have continued to encourage and participate in inter-agency collaboration. We have worked with HCRS, Families First, JOBS Program, Vocational Rehabilitation, and other agencies to help develop additional supports for students and their families.

I embarked on an official journey with regional colleagues and community professionals to begin steps toward regional collaboration, specifically around programming options for low incidence, high intensity populations of students. We have worked on analysis of need, opportunities for programming, and have begun to consider possibilities in the coming years. This has been exciting work!

And then, COVID-19 hit and so much changed! I navigated my way through Federal, State, Governor, Department of Health, Agency of Education, and Medicaid requirements along with my colleagues to ensure continuity of learning for students. It was mere days before we had several systems in place and instruction resumed, which was impressive! Our staff stepped up, worked together, communicated well, and connected with students and families extremely quickly! I felt beyond proud of their work and continue to feel proud of them!

In conjunction, we have begun embarking on explorations of opportunities for the West River Modified Union Education District. It is exciting to think outside the box around the education of our students.

I am in the midst of working on Extended School Year (ESY) also known as summer programs and opportunities for students in special education. We will continue to be flexible with families and staff to ensure everyone feels safe. Once we complete the year-end projects and ESY planning, I will begin working on paraeducator assignments, review of projected caseloads, anticipated student needs, staff training, and other planning I do each summer.

I echo my colleagues when I say that I am extremely proud of the collaboration of our Leadership, staff, Boards, students, families, and communities! It is a pleasure to work with all of you and I look forward to our continued work together!

Director of Operations

This school year marked an ongoing effort to maintain compliance and ensure the safety of our buildings, transportation and food for our staff and students. What started as a typical school year, quickly changed in March with the spread of the human coronavirus.

COVID-19

The onset of COVID-19 presented a shift in the traditional way we operate our buildings. Our immediate response was the training for our custodians to increase the frequency of disinfecting the buildings, with emphasis on touch points (frequently touched hard surfaces). We also audited our cleaning products to ensure we were using the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and using the manufacturers recommended dwell times to utilize the disinfectants to their full capacity.

Other aspects of our COVID-19 response included the very important role our food service operations played during the school closure to make sure all students had access to nutritious food, all week. Kitchens implemented protocols to ensure the safety of our staff and the food. Some of these protocols included increased cleaning of our kitchens, limiting the amount of staff and visitors into food prep areas, daily health screenings, and use of facial coverings. Staff that do not normally participate in food service operations stepped up to ensure meals could be prepared and even delivered to families via bus routes and home drop off.

As we prepared to plan for summer programming and in anticipation of what our building reopening may look like in the fall, we worked hard to develop operational protocols to prevent and respond to a variety of concerns that would impact our staff, students and families. Frequent research is also performed to address the procurement of necessary supplies amid global shortages and maintain compliance of our plan with guidance from the State and the CDC.

One upside to the pandemic has been the additional time our custodians have been able to work inside the buildings without students present. This has unlocked a level of cleaning and preparation we have never seen before, and may not see again. I am confident in saying, the students will be returning to buildings that have never been so “freshened up”!

Infrastructure

Aside from numerous emergency repairs that were performed across all schools, we accomplished a handful of infrastructure upgrades that go above and beyond our general maintenance, some of which included:

- Biomass boiler and window replacement (L&G)
- Roof and LED lighting (Newbrook)
- LED lighting and painting (Marlboro)

- Tremendous amount of painting! (Dover and Townshend)
- Septic and water pumps (Wardsboro)
- Boiler and heating repairs (Windham)
- Bottle filling stations/ water fountains (Jamaica)

We made great progress on the Act 66 lead testing and associated replacement of fixtures. Some buildings completed Enhanced 9-1-1 testing and grants were applied for and received for the necessary upgrades to bring Leland & Gray and Townshend Elementary into compliance.

Leland & Gray has continued progress on structural engineering assessments to determine the long term impact the structural integrity of the facility will play into our planning and budgeting process. In 2017, the building had a Capital Needs Assessment performed, this new structural evaluation started in 2020 takes a deeper dive into the specific structural components of the school.

Safety

Our regular community safety team meetings continue to have a great turnout of our administrators, town departments and first responders. We have exercised a variety of scenarios through tabletop discussions. This has been a great way to interact and build relationships with our community partners, and also bounce different ideas on how to handle various situations.

We continue to utilize the resources of Margolis Healy through the Vermont School Safety Initiative. Some of the work we have collaborated on:

- Virtual tabletop exercises facilitated by Robert Evans, Vermont school safety liaison. Margolis Healy has offered to tailor these exercises to specific schools and audiences to make them unique and a way to have our teachers and support staff directly involved in safety planning.
- Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) integration with Kevin Anderson from Margolis Healy. The state is transitioning to a specific format for school EOP's. Kevin has been assisting us with data sorting and integration into the master plan.
- New implementation of options based response. This will take our safety training one step further to utilize the Run, Hide, Fight methodology. This work is newly instituted on a state level for adoption and we will continue to partner with Margolis Healy and Robert Evans to present to our school community.

Staffing

I have been fortunate to continue with the ongoing roundtables hosted by the VSA and VSBIT. These started off as a way to gather Facilities Managers and Operations Directors from across the state to discuss problems and efficiencies in our SD/SU's. From there, it has evolved to include panel discussions from engineers, state officials, safety coordinators, etc. This has been a positive opportunity to hear from other professionals on problems that all Vermont schools are facing- increased regulations and deferred maintenance, combined with decreasing budgets.

VSBIT also hosted an Essentials of FM workshop that touched base on all areas associated with building operations. I took away some great points of this to start work on our internal operations plan and training that will be established for our custodial teams.

As enrollment in our buildings has been changing, we were able to change some of the staffing within West River MUED to include a custodian that originally was only in one building, and now shares time between two buildings. This has proven to be an asset to have another set of eyes (and hands!) in a building with a larger student population. Each of our custodians excel in different areas and when we come together, we can make great things happen as a team!

With our newly formed districts and more oversight on support staff, custodian accountability has been a hot topic across the buildings. Complaints and deficiencies are being thoroughly followed up on. In some instances, checklists and improvement plans were developed. It is important to make sure we are operating as an effective and efficient department.

Efficiencies

Since the creation of our newly formed districts, many of the schools continued to have individual accounts with our supply vendors. I was able to work with our account representatives from our major suppliers to consolidate the individual accounts. This not only makes it easier to track items and perform account maintenance, but allows our schools to have more purchasing power under one Supervisory Union.

Ongoing analysis on our transportation has been performed in the West River and River Valley districts. We have audited current operations and explored various options and costs while working on long term planning for regular education transportation. Work is also being performed with the Director of Special Education to analyze the options for special education transportation.

Food service operational concerns are being addressed to ensure our programs maintain compliance and equitability for all schools within the respective districts. West River MUED has invested in additional equipment to maximize the potential for creating large volumes of food out of their central hub located in Leland & Gray. Other areas being addressed to continued maintenance of the school kitchens for health inspections and food safety.

If this year is the benchmark of things to come, we will continue to streamline our operations and demonstrate the strength and capacity of the Windham Central Supervisory Union!