

WCSU & WCUUSD Board of Directors Report

by Chair Keri Bristow and Vice Chair Ben Ford

2022 has been a year of resilience, change and achievement for our school district. In this report to our communities, we present an overview of the past year.

First, we are proud of student-led efforts to provide a new name for the district. As part of the Configuration and Enrollment Growth Working Group, our student representatives Owen Courcey and Aiden Keough-Vella completed a project to find a name emblematic of our identity. After consulting with a team from Dartmouth's Tuck Business School and considering a number of names, the Working Group proposed a particularly apt suggestion submitted by students at Killington Elementary School, the "Mountain Views School District." Unanimously accepted by the School Board, it is the culmination of 18 months of information gathering, discussion, and public input.

Several building projects were advanced in 2022 to invest in the conditions of our schools. Led by District Buildings & Grounds Manager Joe Rigoli and Buildings & Grounds Committee Chair Jim Haff, these projects included:

- Completion of renovations to the Prosper Valley School to facilitate its continued use by fifth and sixth grade students;
- Installation of solar panels on the roofs of Prosper Valley, Woodstock, and Reading Elementary Schools to enhance efficiency and sustainability. Prosper Valley and Woodstock received new roofs prior to solar panels being installed.
- Our energy conservation projects this year included: new propane boilers in Reading, Killington, Barnard, and Prosper Valley Elementary Schools. New propane burners in the Woodstock Elementary School. District wide building control systems for improved energy efficiency, new windows in part of Woodstock Elementary, LED lighting in all buildings, low flow plumbing fixtures and new/additional weather stripping and insulation in all buildings.
- Prosper Valley, Barnard, and Woodstock Elementary had their underground oil storage tanks removed and remediated as needed. Woodstock Elementary received a new parking lot after the oil tank under its parking lot was removed.
- Prosper Valley and Reading Elementary had the buildings' exterior painted and repaired as needed. Prosper Valley also received a completely new fire alarm system with addressable detection and a voice evacuation system.

The effort to replace our Middle School and High School buildings also took new direction and made significant progress in the past year. Recognizing the need for additional funding sources beyond our communities' taxpayers, the New Build Working Group enlisted help from Marlena McNamee, who has spent her career in public school fundraising. The Working Group has launched a fundraising campaign entitled "Breaking New Ground", producing a video (found on the WCSU website at <https://www.wcsu.net/breaking-new-ground>), to show the critical need of the project. In its early stages, the campaign has raised nearly \$3M to reduce tax impacts and to help achieve project sustainability goals. In 2023, district communities will be asked to approve funding for hiring a Construction Manager, completing the permitting process, and taking other steps leading to a school bond vote in 2024.

In a win for the district and the environment, Director of Finance and Operations Jim Fenn secured \$1.2M in competitive grant funding from the US EPA's Clean School Bus Program, which will put three all-electric school buses into service for our district next school year. Our school bus provider Butler Bus partnered with WCUUSD to be awarded this grant. We look forward to continuing working toward more sustainable practices.

We continue to see changes to our enrollment patterns, with an increase in demand for Public PreK access as more and more working families seek to enroll young children in our elementary schools. To meet this demand, three new PreK classrooms were added between WES and Killington Elementary School. Overall, school enrollment was impacted by the graduation of a very large senior class in the spring as compared to a smaller grade 7 class entering the Middle School.

In response to COVID-19 challenges, a new leadership model was implemented at the Middle School and High School this fall with a new Assistant Principal and an additional social and emotional coach. Staff and students report that it has made many positive changes in the school community as we returned to full time in-person learning and dealt with the social and emotional aspects of the pandemic.

The Policy Committee was quite active this year in proposing policy revisions and new policies. In May, a new policy "Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity in Education" was approved by the school board following more than two years of consultation, revision, and public input. Currently the faculty and staff are working on implementing the policy and what it looks like at the school level.

Throughout this year several new members have joined the School Board as others stepped down. We thank all of our communities and their representatives for their service to the School Board and for your efforts to bring thoughtful leadership to our schools. With 18 members representing 7 communities, we take particular pride in being recognized by the Vermont School Board Association, which awarded the 2022 Award for Exceptional School Board Leadership to the WCCUSD Board this fall. The Board was recognized for its responsiveness to challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic and demonstration of leadership within the school community, among other achievements consistent with our Strategic Plan Goals.

School Board work is challenging, complex and gratifying. We appreciate public attendance at our meetings, as well as opportunities to talk with community members about concerns. As we look to the future, we are committed to moving all of our students and schools forward educationally, with social and emotional needs being addressed one child at a time. We thank you for your continued support of our schools.