

State of the District Report

Prepared for the Watervliet City School District Board of Education

July 29, 2008

Respectfully Submitted by: Paul J. Padalino, Superintendent of Schools

The intent of this report is to provide the Watervliet City School District Board of Education with an overview of the state of our School District in several key areas. This report is not intended to be comprehensive in scope but a snapshot of important data, events and issues.

FISCAL CONDITION

Last year at this time the Watervliet City School District was in the midst of a fiscal crisis. Under budgeted areas in the 2003/2004 and 2004/2005 School District Budget had translated into a fund deficit for 2005/2006 in the amount of 1.3 million dollars. As of the close of the 2007/2008 fiscal year, the District has fully recovered from this deficit, posting a budget surplus of over \$200,000. The Watervliet City School District now has a positive fund balance for the first time in many years.

The district has developed and implemented a corrective action plan that has been submitted to the State Comptroller's Office for the required approvals. Several measures have already been introduced to address recommendations made by the state within the audit report:

- Responsibilities have been reassigned within the Business Office and a part-time staff member has been hired to achieve greater segregation of duties.
- The district is developing a procedure to address payments made for earned and accrued vacation leave as part of employee separation agreements. The procedures will be outlined in a written document and will call for two separate individuals to independently perform and verify the vacation leave payment calculation.
- The district has retained the services of Ferrara, Fiorenza, Larrison, Barrett and Reitz, P.C., attorneys at law and Teal, Becker and Chiamonte CPAs to revisit and review all separation agreements, including that of the former superintendent, to ensure that no overpayments have occurred.
- The district has developed and implemented responsible budgets for fiscal years 2006-07 and 2007-08, and will continue to do so.
- A formal disaster recovery plan for computerized student and financial data has been developed and will be presented to the Board of Education for approval.

The conservative budgetary policies of the Board of Education and the increased efficiency of our newly instated business practices have paid high dividends for our District. We will continue to operate in this manner to ensure the long – term fiscal health of our schools and school district.

Challenges: The District must continue to adopt and implement balanced budgets as it has in 2006/2007 and 2007/2008.

The Future: The District must keep abreast of the ongoing issues with the State of New York and continue to advocate for mandate relief and growth in state aid to our District. We must also be aware of the growing call for a Tax Cap and prepare to deal with this reality should it come to pass. The District is on a positive fiscal course. Systems have been created and maintained and should allow us to adapt and overcome under most circumstances. The position of Treasurer has been added to the Business Office, as recommended by the New York State Comptroller's auditors.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

During the 2007/2008 school year all major indicators show improvement in student achievement in the Watervliet City School District. While the 2006/2007 School Report Card has still not been released (more than a year late), we are already looking at our 2007/2008 New York State Assessment results (Appendix A). The District administration is confident that our 2007/2008 school accountability report will indicate that we have achieved Annual Yearly Progress in every category.

The late release of the 2006/2007 data has impacted the contents of this report. This information will be compiled and presented publicly to the Board of Education as soon as it is released from embargo by New York State.

The Watervliet Junior Senior High School remains a school in need of improvement and the District is still subject to the enhanced accountability of the Contract for Excellence. In response to this identification, the District administrator's, faculty and staff have embarked on the second year of our School Improvement Team. The work being accomplished by this team has been outstanding. Key areas of focus have been identified and aggressive action plans have been implemented with profound results. We firmly believe that it is the work of this team that has enable us to improve student academic achievement over the last two school years.

The District's School Quality Review by the State Education Department state that the School Improvement Team, District Administration and the School Board are addressing the achievement issues in a positive and effective manner.

The Contract for Excellence site visit team from State Ed. was equally positive, requiring only slight changes in our action plans.

The graduation rate remains an area requiring attention. Seventy three percent of our student are graduating, leaving twenty seven percent of our student either as non-completers or still enrolled. This is an unacceptable statistic that must be improved immediately.

Challenges: The District must achieve Annual Yearly Progress for two consecutive years. This will require fidelity to the systems put in place by the School Improvement Team and the commitment of the Board of Education to allocate resources to this end. The District must also look to the future of education and adopt instructional policies that include Twenty First Century Skills for our students; collaboration, communication and

critical thinking are the skills of the future work force. Our District must also look to ensure that our graduation rate improves dramatically.

The Future: The future of academic achievement in the Watervliet City School District is bright. The forward momentum cited in the State of the District Address for 2006/2007 continues. Our students are making great strides in accomplishing the positive learning outcomes that we expect for them.

CURRICULUM AND PROGRAMS

Over the last three years multiple new programs have been implemented in both Watervliet Junior – Senior High School and Watervliet Elementary School.

In 2006/2007 highlighted programs included: Reading First, Universal Pre- Kindergarten, CEIP and our new Special Education Programs.

Each of these programs will continue in 2008/2009.

The 2008/2009 school year will include several new initiatives. The movement toward curriculum mapping will be a strong focus of our K-9 staff over the next twelve months. This initiative aims to effectively align our curriculum with the New York State standards and provide a useful tool for our teachers.

We will also be adding a Reading teacher to the Junior – Senior High School staff. This will free up the current Reading Teacher to serve as a Literacy Coach. This Literacy Coach will provide support and imbedded professional development for our staff as well as monitor data, assessments and Academic Intervention Services.

A Math Specialist has been added to the Elementary School to assist struggling students in mathematics, as well as monitor our Academic Intervention Services program at Watervliet Elementary

Two more In-District Special Education Classes will be added at the Watervliet Junior – Senior High School as laid out in our three phase plan initiated in 2006/2007.

Academic based extra-curricular activities have increased dramatically, in both offerings and participation: Elementary Robotics, Elementary and Middle School Odyssey of the Mind, Enviro-thon, Master-Minds, and Future Cities Team to name a few.

Challenges: In the area of curriculum and programs the Watervliet City School District faces the same challenges as many other small city school districts. We must weigh our ability to provide a world class, 21st century education with our resources available to accomplish this lofty goal.

The Future: Please see Academic Achievement

FACILITIES/BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS

Once again in 2008, the voters of the Watervliet City School District overwhelmingly approved a bond referendum to improve our school buildings. In March of 2008 a \$22 million bond referendum was passed that will bring the Watervliet Junior – Senior High School into the 21st Century.

This project, coupled with the \$8.6 million project currently underway at Watervliet Elementary School will provide our students and community with school facilities that are up- to- date and a source of great pride.

Phase I of the construction was completed in September of 2007 and Phase II has begun. Phase III (high school) is estimated to begin in January of 2009 and be completed in September of 2010.

Challenges: The District must ensure that each phase of the approved projects remains on time and on budget. The scope of the projects must provide the needs identified by the Board of Education without incurring further expense to the taxpayers of our city.

The Future: The District and staff will experience the many inconveniences that are associated with large building projects, however we are doing all that we can to alleviate possible problems and reduce the impact on student learning. In September of 2010 the district will begin the school year with new facilities.

MISSION STATEMENT

The School Improvement Team sub-committee has completed their work on the new Mission Statement for the Watervliet City School District (Appendix B). This mission statement is the product of many hours of work by the Mission Statement Sub-Committee. This committee was made up of teachers, teacher assistants, administrators, clerical staff and community members. The mission statement was posted on the District web site for review by all stakeholders of our district with an invitation to comment and make suggestions. In the end the new Mission Statement represents our mission and goals for the Watervliet City School District.

CONTRACT FOR EXCELLENCE

As previously stated, the Watervliet City School District is still subject to the enhanced accountability of the Contract for Excellence. The 2008/2009 contract proposal has been posted on the District web site and a public hearing was held in July (Appendix C).

CONCLUSION

The state of the Watervliet City School District is strong. The District has been aggressive in attacking the three key areas of need that were identified by the Board of Education and the Superintendent in 2005; facilities, student achievement and fiscal health. The ambitious building plan is addressing the facilities needs, the School Improvement Team is moving forward with our plan to further improve student achievement and our fiscal health has been restored.

The future of the Watervliet City School District is very bright. The District will continue to face any challenges that arise in an open and transparent manner. We will also follow the model of continuous improvement in every area of operation.