



SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT TO THE BOARD

To: WSD Board President and Board of Trustees
From: Wilmer Chavarria, WSD Superintendent
Re: **Superintendent's Report for April 2025**
Date: 4/06/2025

Dear Members of The Board,

Below please find my report for **April 2025** and refer any questions about a given item directly to me during the regularly scheduled board meeting or to the Board President and me if your inquiry is prior to the meeting.

Thank you for your work in advancing the Ends Statement of our district to form students who will "lead healthy, productive and successful lives and engage with their local and global community."

Respectfully Submitted,

Wilmer A. Chavarria, NBCT
Superintendent of Schools
Winooski School District
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Pre-K students pay close attention while the teacher gives them instructions for outside play.

GENERAL UPDATES

- **We will be relocating** our entire district to St Michael's college on Friday April 18th in the afternoon. This is a major undertaking and it will require the careful cooperation of all staff and partners. Officer Saja is coordinating with law enforcement and St Michales college for the logistics of the day. Our staff received the guidance last Friday and we are now collecting feedback before issuing improved and more detailed guidance if necessary. Later in the week, we will be issuing family communication to ensure that there is enough time to plan ahead in case a family's plan conflicts with the drill. We hope to have all students back to the school district before dismissal time so that families do not have to retrieve students from the alternative location. Additional drills for the remainder of the year will take on place on May 12 (Bus Evacuation) and June 3 (Egress).
- **We will be hosting** the superintendents from the region this Friday April 11. The Champlain Valley Superintendents Association is the most active group of superintendents in the state. We are working overtime these days to ensure that input from the field is truly incorporated in the conversations about education occurring on multiple fronts. Hosting leaders from the region right here in Winooski helps us remind everyone of the value of our unique community and the importance of preserving much of what makes it special. The State Board of Education will be having its meeting in our district on Thursday 17th as well.

OUR STANCE ON “ILLEGAL DEI”

Not advancing inclusion or equity is illegal and immoral. Federal and state law, old and new, consistently requires that public schools and much of the rest of society operate from an affirmative and inclusive stance. From Special Education Law, to Anti-Discrimination rules in the workplace, the concepts and principles behind what the current executive has essentialized to “DEI” continue to provide the basis for my response to the escalating pressure.

On Friday April 4, the Vermont Secretary of Education, Zoie Saunders, directed all superintendents to comply. While many downplay the significance of the letter that the Trump administration requires us to sign, which demands that we do not engage in a hypothetical and undefined “illegal DEI,” I’m left to conclude that this is a move designed to further exert arbitrary and unlawful control over what our schools do and don’t do.

My response to the Secretary is that I will not sign. The board is encouraged to discuss this topic in depth and to ask questions before making a decision on whether to make a recommendation to me either way. At the time of publication of this report in the packet (Monday), state associations such as the VSBA and VSA were seeking to meet with the Secretary to address this matter. I will provide you updates during the meeting.

Please join me in calling on the state leaders, especially the Secretary of Education, to exert a genuine commitment to equity through actions, not words. What has transpired over the past few days leaves me with even less confidence that our state is willing to walk the walk. For an example of how a state should respond to arbitrary threats and legally dubious demands from the US Department of Education, please see New York’s Swift response here. I forwarded this letter to state offices on Saturday along with my refusal to sign.



The Vermont State Board of Education will hold its April meeting here at Winooski School District on April 16th. The plan is for the State Board to arrive around 10:30 or 11:00 a.m. for a school tour, followed by lunch. The meeting is scheduled to begin at approximately 1:00 p.m. and is expected to continue until about 4:30 p.m.

GENERAL AND OPERATIONAL UPDATES

- **I will be traveling to Nicaragua** during the break to help my family relocate back from the United States. As some of you may know, the only family I had with me (my four family members, including Bernardino Chavarria, who works as our Spanish liaison) were victims of the arbitrary decisions of the Trump Administration. Even though my family members are “legal” immigrants, their program was abruptly cancelled and they were notified that they had to leave the country by April 25 or face arrest and deportation. This has been causing quite a bit of stress on a personal level, but I am thankful for the expressions of support from the people around me as I accompany my family in this transition. I believe a small music recital is in the works for Dino and his daughter Nahomy to spoil us with some nice Nicaraguan folk music before they leave. Matt Gile is kindly working on this and he will communicate when we have the details!
- **We continue** to provide constant feedback to the legislative discussions happening at lightning speed in Montpelier. Many students, Board, staff, and community members have made their voices heard throughout the process. We do not require people to run their testimony by me beforehand, and I agree with that approach. Although people often voluntarily give me a heads up or allow me to read their material ahead of time, I also believe that people should not hesitate to reach out to legislators or see “checking with me” as a delaying barrier. Even if we are not aligned with all the details, the spirit behind all testimony so far has been aligned with what I believe Winooski needs. The board, of course, is always welcome to create policy around this if you do not believe that this approach protects the district sufficiently.
- **Mohamed Diop is pleased to announce** that Daniel Muhwezi has joined us as a multilingual liaison for Swahili, Kinyarwanda, and French, effective today. Daniel has often worked with us through the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), and we are thrilled to have him officially join our team of multilingual liaisons. We look forward to his continued contributions to our community. If you see him, please introduce yourself to help him feel welcome.



Students rehearse together during music class at the Winooski Middle High School.

COLLEGE AND CAREER READY

- **Flexible Pathways Update:** Last month, a very busy local physician prioritized time in his schedule to visit Winooski High School and advance our students' career readiness in the career pathway of health and medicine. The UVM 4H Extension Program in partnership with the Larner College of Medicine/UVM Admissions Ambassadors Program provided a three-session sequence of workshops from their "Health Heroes" program. Held afterschool at the high school on March 12, 19 and 26, the series is ordinarily held at UVM/Larner on evenings and weekends. Co-facilitated by Dr. Anthony Williams of UVMMC and Margaret Coan of UVM Extension, the purpose of the program is to model how a physician cares for their patients' health while educating high school students about such topics as preventive medicine and mental health. Winooski HS students have attended school-sponsored field trips to the UVM-held Health Heroes sessions; learning away from school in authentic settings is key to career readiness. Yet, removing the transportation barrier and meeting our students where they are quadrupled the program's reach from 4 to 16 students from Winooski. Next up and with the guidance of Dr. Leila Amiri, Associate Dean of Admissions, Dr. Williams and a team of Larner College student ambassadors will be offering job shadows and other mentoring opportunities for Winooski high school students. Together with the long term UVM Spartan Advance program, this initiative advances career readiness in the career pathway of health and medicine, an area of great interest among our students and a growing industry.



Kinder students leave the cafeteria as high school students make their way in.

COLLEGE AND CAREER READY

- **April Preview:** High school students will be learning in the community at businesses and colleges in Winooski, Castleton, Richmond, Burlington and Milton. They will learn about opportunities for paid service learning, dual enrollment college credit, job shadows, internships, apprenticeships and summer jobs in the fields of hospitality, agriculture, environmental science, cybersecurity, and machinist/advanced manufacturing.
- **With reference to the request** for comparative data on technical center application and acceptance rates across districts, the team is requesting to postpone the update until May. This will allow for the incorporation of more accurate data into a report, because decisions for 2025-26 placements won't be finalized until later this spring. Additionally, so far the technical centers have been unable to provide us with the level of disaggregated data that would allow us to view demographic trends as requested by the board. We would like to use the next month to pursue that data. (High School Team).
- **The Center for Technology, Essex,** hosted its annual Induction Ceremony for students who have excelled academically and have achieved the honor of being selected as members of the National Technical Honor Society (NTHS). The following WMS student(s) were inducted: Elizabeth Perrotte (returning member), Ivy Resmer, Taylor Sweeney.

HEALTHY AND PRODUCTIVE

- **Congratulations to our All-State honorees!** Hussein Mohamed was selected for the prestigious Dream Dozen award, recognizing the top 12 underclassmen in the state with the brightest basketball futures. Omar Turnage received Mountain League Honorable Mention for his performance. Winner Mampuya represented our program in the North/South All-Star Game on March 22nd and was awarded a \$500 scholarship in honor of former coach Eric Ward, who valued defense, leadership, and teamwork qualities Winner exemplifies. Chris Buker also earned a spot in the North/South All-Star Game and received Mountain League Second Team honors. These individual accomplishments highlight the strength of our athletics program and our athletes' dedication to excellence. Congratulations to all our student-athletes for their hard work, leadership, and commitment to their teams!
- **Jr. Miles Program kickoff** happened in early March with our new district liaison officer Saja. Saja has been running with five students every Wednesday afterschool to help them prepare to run a leg of the Vermont City Marathon, if they choose. Students received a free pair of running shoes as part of their participation in this program. Saja looks forward to the program growing each year.
- **From Patrice Lumumba: Planning the Second Wellness Day**—To ensure the event aligns with staff needs and interests, I have distributed a survey to gather feedback on preferred activities and formats. This input will help shape the structure of the day, ensuring it provides meaningful opportunities for relaxation, team-building, and personal well-being. Organizing the Second Staff Breakfast—I am coordinating another staff breakfast to foster connection and appreciation among staff members. A sign-up sheet will be shared this week, allowing staff to volunteer for contributions and participation. This event aims to create a welcoming space for colleagues to connect informally before the workday begins.



LOCAL AND GLOBAL COMMUNITY

- **About a dozen Winooski Middle High School** teachers are engaging in a special PLC called: Critical Reflections of Navigating Different Identities in Classroom Settings, facilitated by David W. Hollingsworth, PhD. The objective of this group is to discuss ways to support teachers as they navigate the unique situation of teaching students with various identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation) in classroom settings. Time will also be spent in critical reflection and discussion on how to intervene when conflicts arise between students of various and/or similar identities.
- **Congratulations to the Jr. Iron Chef Winooski Wild Onions-** Ankita Dhungana, Aili Olson and Anisha Tamang for winning the Mise En Place Award!! This is the 3rd year in a row that this awesome team has won an award. This award goes to the team that exemplifies teamwork, organization, cleanliness and approached their dish in a thoughtful way. Thank you Adam Raftery, Waterworks and Adriana Penalosa-Kirby for supporting their success!

Mapenzi Selemani is the Vermont Poetry Out Loud State Champion. She will head to Washington DC in May for nationals.





LOCAL AND GLOBAL COMMUNITY

As part of their **Culture & Community Capstone**, Albina Rai and Sam Galle are leading a Spanish club. They surveyed our high school students to determine which languages and cultures they would be interested in learning, and Spanish emerged as the most popular choice. Ms. Haiduck, who's well versed in the Spanish language and culture, is excited to support Sam and Albina in launching the Spanish Club, which will be held on Thursdays, starting Thursday, April 10th, during advisory in Room A154.

The Project Advisory Committee (PAC) for the Burlington Winooski Bridge project will present information about the bridge renovation to our high school students on April 9th, from 11:15 a.m. to 11:55 a.m. This event will take place at the Winooski School District's Performing Arts Center. Students will have the opportunity to learn about the project and share their ideas regarding the future aesthetics of the Burlington Winooski Bridge.

From our 21C Program: Two 5th grade students, Lone and Phiness developed their leadership skills volunteering their time in the Tuesday, Dance and Creative Movement for students in grades K 3 in the 21C Second session. Lone enjoyed being around younger students and dancing with them. Phiness liked helping the students and getting to know their personalities. She described the students as "playful and nice."

The Mandala Community Weaving unveiling event celebrated the Mandala's permanent home at WSD. The students in the 21C Afterschool program enjoyed working with the Heritage Winooski Mill Museum.

MORE UPDATES

- **In response to board interest**, the Director of Finance & Operations and the Director of Facilities will present an overview of the WSD facility. This presentation will cover operational needs related to the new building and aims to equip the board with information to address public inquiries. The Director of Finance & Operations will arrange for Efficiency Vermont to attend a future board meeting. They will discuss the new building's energy systems, projected short-term and long-term cost savings, the impact on future budgets, and answer questions related to energy efficiency. As the district prepares for the next budget season, the Director of Finance & Operations will review the long-term facilities plan and associated needs for the Winooski School District (WSD). This information will be shared with the board to inform discussions and decisions regarding facility needs and potential capital improvements during the upcoming budget process.
- **Passport to Financial Independence:** Winooski Students are on their way to Financial Independence! A new challenge has rolled out in the Personal Finance classes. Thanks to a grant from the Vermont NEA and sponsorship from NorthCountry Federal Credit Union, Ms. Poquette secured \$3,000 in funding to offer students this opportunity to expand their learning. Each Personal Finance student received a “passport to financial independence” filled with 40 optional challenges to expand on what they are learning in class. Some of the challenges include: opening bank accounts, comparison shopping at the grocery store, volunteering their time, reading a personal finance book, learning a profitable skill, comparing insurance quotes, building credit and setting up retirement accounts. In the first week of the challenge two students stood out by cancelling some recurring subscriptions that they were paying for, but realized they could live without. This has already amounted to hundreds of dollars in savings for our students. For completing passport stamps students will earn prizes from NorthCountry, which were selected by a panel of students. The prizes range from school supplies and water bottles to money for their savings accounts. When all three classes reach 300 points, a special luncheon will be held to celebrate the accomplishment!





KEY DATES

- Tuesday, April 8, Middle School Dumpling Challenge (Board welcome)
- Thursday, April 10, Board Training (Policy Governance) at 6 PM online
- Wednesday April 16th, State Board of Education Tour and Meeting in Winooski
- Friday, April 18th, Relocation Drill to St Michael's College
- Friday, April 18th, Veggie Van Go
- Monday, April 21 - Friday April, 25, No School, Spring Break

ADMINISTRATIVE ENGAGEMENTS

- 4/6 I met with legislators for updates and discussion on legislative topics.
- 4/5 I attended a planning session with Harvard Pan-Asian Coalition for Education
- 4/3 I was invited as a guest panelist for the New and Aspiring Superintendents Academy
- 4/2 I attended the public education townhall for the Chittenden region here in Winooski
- 3/31 I attended the informal working group for addressing supports for immigrant families
- 3/31 I attended the VSA Legislative Roundtables
- 3/28 I met with the NEA's Vice President and Vermont's NEA president in my office
- 3/27 I attended the All-Members Meeting for the VSA in Montpelier with the VT Education Secretary and key legislators
- 3/25-26 I presented immigration enforcement procedure for support staff at JFK
- 3/24 I attended the ARSC
- 3/20 I attended the VT Leaders of Color gathering
- 3/17 I met with the City Manager

ITEMS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

Below are a few items the board assigned to management along with a status update.

Item	Board Direction	Status
Efficiency Vermont	The board requested information about the event taking place in our facilities by Efficiency Vermont.	Sarah Haven shared information about this event. Up to two board members representing the WSD were invited to attend.
CTE Presentation	The board received a presentation from the Winooski High School Team regarding CTE enrollment trends. These trends showed a declining enrollment and acceptance rate for Winooski students. The board directed the administration to reach out to the CTE centers for additional demographic and admissions data.	We reached out to the superintendents of the Burlington School District and the Essex-Westford School District for their demographic data and admission rates for Chittenden area districts. We received responses with a good amount of data, albeit not everything the board is probably seeking. The MHS team is preparing a final report to you for the next board meeting. They decided to wait and receive all this year's admission results before coming back to you.
The Wobbly Table Keeps Appearing on its own	The wobbly table keeps appearing.	The Director of Finance and Operations has provided assurance that this will be avoided.
Facilities	The board wants to continue to receive more "facilities 101" information about our new building and long-term maintenance plans.	Sarah Haven will provide more updates during the meeting and a series of updates throughout the year especially at key moments (such as budget season). This will include information on "unfinished business" from the construction.