

LWV CHARTER SCHOOL CONSENSUS STUDY

INTERVIEW

**SCHOOL DISTRICT 90, RIVER FOREST
SUPERINTENDENT EDWARD J. CONDON, Ph.D.
July 16, 2014**

The River Forest School District consists of two elementary schools, Lincoln and Willard, and Roosevelt Middle School. District 90 is unusual in that the elementary schools consists of grades K-4, and the middle school of grades 5-8. The total number of students in the district is 1,360.

Having received the questions in advance, Dr. Condon provided last year's student handbook with pages marked that pertained to the questions. He noted that although each family is given a handbook, the students no longer receive planners as the code of conduct, attendance policy, etc. are on their iPads.

The attendance policy follows the state compulsory requirements. Dr. Condon said that the maximum number of absences was lowered by the state last year, but he also remarked that funding was also lowered in the West Cook Regional Office, diminishing the support for truancy issues.

The code of conduct is rather straight-forward, governing student behavior in school and prohibiting use or possession of alcohol, drugs, unauthorized electronic devices, bullying and gangs. Disciplinary measures include suspension up to 10 days and expulsion up to 2 years.

Parent volunteering is encouraged, especially in grades K-4.

Advanced courses are available in the middle school and consist of small group instruction. More advanced middle school students may take classes at the high school, since classes are usually scheduled in the middle of the day, this becomes a problem for parents, who must provide transportation. Also, the middle school utilizes the Illinois Virtual School to provide instruction for advanced students. Instructional blocks are used in grades K-4 to provide instruction to meet the needs of students, including the advanced students.

Students encountering problems with learning are identified through teacher collaboration. Response to Intervention (RTI) is used to determine and monitor the intervention of instruction for these students. This intervention progresses through small group instruction to one-to-one instruction in Special Education. The intervention progresses up through a series of tiers as needed, and is managed by a team of teachers.

Beginning in school year 2016-17, state law requires school districts to develop/design teacher evaluation in accordance with The Professional Review Act

(PARA). The two components of PARA are professional practice and student growth. The current ratio of teacher performance to student progress is 50/50, but can be designed to be as high as 70/30. A team of six administrators and six teachers designed the Professional Practice portion for the district, which will be implemented in 2015. Student progress is currently evaluated by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, as well as the ISAT; but the tests will be replaced by the new "PARCC", which consists of two components which are performance based, relying on formative and summative data. The two parts will be administered in March and May.

The strategy used to promote innovation in the classroom is teacher collaboration. The middle school schedule provides time for teachers to meet. K-4 teachers are provided with 60 minutes a week to meet. Through collective bargaining, teachers are compensated for the time. The teachers were very much in favor of uniformity in this regard. The Common Core Standards have been adopted, and the overall feeling about the program, supported by the state, is positive. Dr. Condon described it as having more depth rather than breadth of learning. The standards themselves are about what is taught, not how to teach. The math standards provide focus on conceptual development, application, and computation skills. He did acknowledge that parents struggle with the math portion, however. A new reading program which reflects the standards was adopted as well.

District 90 started taking Federal funds 3 years ago, which requires adequate yearly progress (AYP). We discussed the issue of real estate taxes funding local schools, and Dr. Condon said that with 76% of the state's schools being underfunded, he feels fortunate that District 90's budget is balanced. He said that as long as funding is provided through real estate taxes, there would be a problem with fairness. With regard to charter schools, he acknowledged that there is inconsistency in quality of education.

Submitted by Jane Schlichting and Beverly Graham