FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

Do you have a general, district-wide question? Please send an email to windsorw@hartfordschools.net or call me at 802-295-8660. I will try to provide you with an answer as quickly as possible. Thank you. ~Wendy Windsor, Director of Communications.

Q: How do you decide to cancel school due to bad weather?

A: This is actually an involved and time-consuming process that relies on many different sources of information. If a storm is expected to hit, then Dr. LaPlante begins checking his computer regularly for the latest storm updates frequently starting as much as 48 hours ahead of the storm event. He also contacts other local superintendents to discuss options. The afternoon before the day in question will see multiple radar checks, consultation with area superintendents, and checks of the most recent weather advisories. Weather advisory and radar checks continue until about 11 PM. Dr. LaPlante typically will rise at 4 AM to again check the weather advisories/radar, monitor television reports, speak with area superintendents, check with the Hartford dispatch center when appropriate, and consult with the Hartford School District transportation coordinator. The decision to call school, have a delayed start, or hold school is generally made at 5:30 with the AlertNow system activated at approximately 5:50 AM and notification of radio, television, district hotline, and SoverNet immediately following the programming of the AlertNow message.

Q: Why is the high school graduation on Friday now instead of Thursday? Now I can't go to both Hartford and Lebanon/Dartmouth graduations.

A:

It gives the school district an extra snow day just in case it is needed,

Family members who are traveling long distances will not need to take extra time off work,

Graduates will be able to attend Project Graduation without worrying about having to go to school the next day,

Graduation chaperones don't have to worry about going to work the next day after staying up all night,

Lebanon's graduation date for 2009 is June 11 and Dartmouth College's graduation is June 14 so there is no conflict.

Q: Why do seniors have to go to school an extra week now?

A: Turns out the "tradition" of letting seniors out of school a week early is in violation of State Board of Education requirements. All

students in the State of Vermont must attend 175 full days of classes. Sorry, but we don't intend to knowingly break the rules. 💻

Q: If I have a specific complaint about a staff member or practice, how should I handle this?
A: Ideally, you would want to speak directly with that person; chances are good that they have no idea that a problem exists. This will give the staff member an opportunity to either make things right or at least explain why things are as they are and provide the best options for you. If you are really upset, you will get the best results if you can remain respectful and actively listen to the other person—this will keep the lines of communication open. To speak with a teacher, call the school and leave a phone message or send them an email. Not all teachers have phones in their rooms but they are expected to answer calls and email in a timely manner.

If you still feel your problem or complaint is still not adequately resolved, then please take your problem to the next level—the school Principal. After that, take your problem or issue to Superintendent Dr. Don LaPlante. If your issue is more general in nature then phone or email Superintendent (laplanted@hartfordschools.net) Dr. LaPlante directly.

Please call Don before you call your favorite school board member; it is Don's job to resolve issues and he has the authority and backing of the School Board to do so as quickly as possible.

If you are still dissatisfied with the outcome of your conversation with the Superintendent, then request an opportunity to meet with the school board. Such a request may be made either to the superintendent or the chairman of the school board.

Q: What is policy governance and why did we change to this?
A: Policy Governance® is an integrated board leadership model created by Dr. John Carver. It is a groundbreaking model of governance designed to empower boards of directors to fulfill their obligation of accountability for the organizations they govern. The model enables the board to focus on the larger issues, to delegate with clarity, to control management's job without meddling, to rigorously evaluate the accomplishment of the organization; to truly lead its organization.

For more information on policy governance, please visit Superintendent Don LaPlante's blog. He provides links to sources of information which explain policy governance more completely.

Q: Why has the format of school board meetings changed and why must citizens call ahead and schedule the opportunity to speak?
A: The format changed for several reasons:

1. Many of the questions or issues raised by citizens could be answered better and faster if they had gone through the proper channels. *Under the new "ends" rules, if you have a question or an issue, speak to your child's teacher first, then the principal, and if you still are not satisfied, call the superintendent.* The superintendent is now empowered to make decisions quickly,

2. Some questions are inappropriate, for example, complaining about staff. These should be handled by the school principal or the superintendent and not in a public meeting,

3. School Board members are often ill-prepared to answer people's questions on the spot because they have not had time to research the issues. This wastes meeting time and often leads to misinformation,

4. Some questions are more suitable for a wider-group discussion. Parents at-large should have the opportunity to join in these discussions so the conversation can be more meaningful. If the superintendent feels that a special meeting is warranted he will call one and it will be advertised in the newspapers and on the district website.

Q: Why do we need a Development Plan?
A: There are three major forces at play in Hartford and generally throughout the U.S. that can no longer be ignored:

1. Our school/child population is declining,
2. Our buildings are in need to expensive repair and/or upgrades to either bring them up to code or to meet the challenging teaching needs in education brought on by technology,
3. Many of our teaching staff are baby-boomers and have started to retire and this means that our pupil-student ratios will be unbalanced across the district.

Q: What are the steps involved in creating a Master Plan?

A: A good master plan begins with research and this is the phase we are in right now. At this point we have:

• Inventoried and surveyed all our properties,

• Contracted with engineers and architects to:

- Analyze all of our school building facilities in terms of plumbing, heating and general physical condition,
- Examine the building "envelope" to see which properties could handle expansion,
- Create a Master Plan Steering Committee consisting of board members, administrators, teachers, parents, students, and town government representatives to examine alternatives to our present arrangement of buildings and properties. The purpose is to determine if there might be a more efficient, less costly, and more productive way in which to present learning opportunities to our students.

Q: After the Steering Committee decides on a recommended plan, what will be the next step in the Development Plan process?
A: The Steering Committee will bring the recommended plan to the school board for consideration. The board will then:

- Determine how to fully engage the public in the discussion of facility/program planning and development,
- Conduct a series of public meeting to fully consider the alternatives and recommendations being suggested by the Master Plan Steering Committee,
- Review recommendations and suggestions provided by the public and consult, as necessary, with administration, Master Plan Steering Committee, architects, and engineers,
- Finalize the Development Plan and determine the appropriate path for implementation.

Q: Why do we have a Director of Communications person now?
A: In a resent district employee survey, staff identified as their #1 concern the lack of, or poor communication. With several important changes and projects beginning to unfold we recognized a need to significantly increase and improve communications. This position was created to help address that need.

The communications person is responsible for internal and external communication channels throughout the district, including the website, brand managing, media relations, and many other things. With the help of parents and staff we hope to improve communications. Although this position is new to our

district, many of the other school districts in the Upper Valley have a person dedicated to communications.

Q: I heard that school principals are no longer supposed to speak to the press. Why not?

A: Actually, this is not a new policy; employees have always been required to direct press calls to the superintendent. Now that we have a Director of Communications the calls are directed to that person. Most of our principals are relieved not to have this added responsibility because it takes time away from their primary job—school administration.