

New school standings explained in Waterbury**Meeting to show how 'turnaround' becomes 'focus'**

BY MICHAEL PUFFER REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

WATERBURY — Schools Chief Academic Officer Darren Schwartz will explain city schools' standing under the state's new accountability system to the Board of Education and broader public tonight.

"Everyone can get a full picture of the state's accountability system," Schwartz said.

Under the new rating system, the long-struggling Walsh Elementary School is no longer a "turnaround school" but a "focus school," according to lists distributed by the State Department of Education last week.

The new rating means Walsh is no longer counted among the bottom 5 percent of schools overall. But, as a focus school, Walsh's "high needs subgroup," combining learning disabled, English language learners, and low-income students, is among the lowest performing subgroups statewide.

Schwartz said the new classification will not immediately mean Walsh's removal from the state's Commissioner's Network initiative, which pays for reforms at the state's lowest performing schools. The state program means an extra \$624,720 for Walsh this school year.

Crosby and Wilby high schools are also listed as turnaround schools in the new evaluation system, which is intended to account for a range of school quality factors beyond simple test scores. Graduation rates, attendance and even physical fitness are among a number of new variables considered. Crosby is also enrolled in the Commissioner's Network, but Wilby is not.

Another 11 Waterbury schools are listed in the "focus" category by the State Department of Education.

Schwartz's presentation will include participation by the district's instructional leadership directors and curriculum directors.

Other topics include:

A request to add \$67,000 to the district's \$968,000 contract with Kaestle Boos Associates for the design of an addition to Kennedy High School. The additional money is needed for the firm to design a new artificial turf field, which was later added to the project with state bond funds.

A proposed 2 percent raise for non-union, grant-funded, employees. If approved beginning this month, the cost for the remainder of the fiscal 2016 year would be \$20,550, according to a memo from Interim Chief Operating Officer Gary Miller. The cost for a full fiscal year would be \$59,357, Miller wrote. The impacted employees are either completely or mostly grant-funded, meaning a "negligible" impact on the General Fund, Miller wrote.

Various legislative requests to state lawmakers.

The board meeting is open to the public, although there is no allowance for public speaking on the workshop agenda. Workshops are generally used for the introduction of new topics to the board, and not for votes. Those, along with public speaking, will be part of a board meeting on March 17.

Tonight's meeting begins at 5:30 p.m. at Sprague Elementary School, 1443 Thomaston Ave.