

Cleveland Heights-University Heights School Board Overview

By LWV observers Paula Goodwin and Rosemarie Fairman

Based on reports from May 2023-April 2024

The Cleveland Heights-University Heights (CH-UH) Board of Education usually holds two public meetings each month, with the superintendent, treasurer, and other members of the superintendent's staff in attendance along with board members. The regular meeting, held the first Tuesday of each month, addresses issues that require the board's vote for approval and a work session, usually held the third Tuesday of the month, provides presentations on curriculum, school programs, extra curriculars, facilities, and other detailed information.

In January 2024, Gabe Crenshaw and Phil Trimble joined Jodi Sourini, Malia Lewis and Dan Heintz on the CH-UH Board of Education. Both were elected in November with no opposition. James Posch and Beverly Wright, having completed two terms, stepped down.

Equity

The CH-UH schools' Five-Point Strategic Plan serves as an organized guide for all choices and actions made by the administration and the board of education.

Equity in the education arena is an overarching goal for the board members and the administration. It is included in the strategic plan, is always addressed in the superintendent's reports, and guides the questions asked by board members during discussions of most programs.

Finances

Scott Gainer, the district treasurer, presents regular reports as required by the State of Ohio. He also explains standards for ethical behavior in school finance and informs the board of upcoming state legislation that will impact CH-UH schools.

He has endeavored to see that the district is in full compliance with the state's rules regarding transparency for public school finances. The financial reports are accessible through the board of education website (<https://www.chuh.org/BoardofEducation.aspx>). Future funding from the State of Ohio is uncertain as we await the results of the Vouchers Hurt Ohio lawsuit and the consequences of the state's new expanded private school voucher program.

In addition to the funds received from property taxes and the State of Ohio, the schools receive funding for specific programs from a wide variety of public and private agencies. For example, the schools receive funding from the federal E-Rate program that provides 85-90% of the funding for their technological needs; they receive some funding from the county's Universal Pre-Kindergarten program for the preschool program. In addition, families pay fees for some programs such as pre-school and summer school.

School Climate

The district has adopted a program to address disciplinary problems within the schools. The Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program has been introduced in each elementary and middle school and the principals and staff have received training to address

specific instances of negative behavior and to work directly with students. In February, a cell phone safety symposium took place at Heights High where parents and students from Heights schools learned to navigate online threats more safely.

Heights schools each developed activities to assist students and staff to move forward after the deaths of several students at different times during this school year. There was dedicated school time to provide counseling and other services to help students and staff navigate the emotions arising from such losses.

The documented effects of educational disruption from COVID and other outside events has led to the focus on Social-Emotional Learning (SEL). Aligning with Ohio's Whole Child Framework, CH-UH school district adopted a SEL curriculum, hired a director of Social Emotional Learning and Academic Supports, and developed a relationship with community resources to provide additional support for students.

Data

Adhering to the district's strategic plan presents an organized framework for the business of providing the CH-UH community with a school system that strives to meet and exceed the needs of the students. The superintendent's team provides comprehensive data of student progress and how improvement can be achieved.

The superintendent provides a written report at each regular board meeting and she and other members of the administration describe the latest results of ongoing measures for reading and math proficiency, enrollment, absenteeism, and graduation. Decisions are made on the basis of evidence derived from local and other sources.

Curriculum

In 2023-2024, the board approved the adoption of new curriculums for English Language Arts (ELA) and for math. The adoption of new programs requires the purchase of new materials as well as training for members of the administration and teaching staff. The district begins by introducing a pilot program and, if successful, the program is introduced districtwide. Both the new ELA and math curriculums have begun districtwide implementation.

In addition to classroom instruction, students are offered a variety of other opportunities for their education. The college credit plus program allows students to earn college credit through programs with Tri-C, Cleveland State University (CSU), and other colleges. Career and technical education (CTE) students can participate in industry-focused learning and achieve credit through web-based testing. Clinical health students work with MetroHealth Hospital. Gearity students can take part in a science curriculum in partnership with the Cleveland Museum of Natural History.

Health and Wellness

MetroHealth has provided resources for a wellness center at the high school where students and their families and staff can receive support for mental health issues. The district also works with other community resources such as Bellefaire JCB, Lake Erie Ink, Students of Promise, and other community programs that support academic enrichment and social-emotional support.

LWV Advocacy

Funding for public education is a constitutional mandate in Ohio. Now, more than ever, promoting strong, equitable educational opportunities for all people is an important part of the LWV's work because public education builds informed citizens. A strong background in all disciplines is important, and a background in history and civics promotes the development of an active participant in our democracy. There are many issues involved for building the next generation of voters, public servants and legislatures. It all starts with the young.

We observers, by reporting on our local school district, are also aware that the state and federal government influence educational policy, funding, and many resources. We LWV members are committed to advocating at local school boards, the state agencies, and the state legislature for robust, equitable, and comprehensive public education for all.

Documents for all board meetings can be accessed from the Board of Education webpage: www.chuh.org/BoardofEducation.aspx. Go to "BoardDocs" in the left frame menu; on BoardDocs go to "MEETINGS" in the top menu; click on "Agenda."

Board meetings are livestreamed on the district's YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/CHUHSchools) and recorded for later viewing.

LWV observer reports can be found online at <https://lwvgreatercleveland.org/chuh-observer-corps>