



BOE Not to Renew UCESC Hillcrest Lease

By MEGHAN GILL
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The board of education last week announced it would terminate the lease of Lincoln School to Hillcrest Academy South, a school operated by the Union County Educational Services Commission (UCESC) at 728 Westfield Avenue. UCESC has leased the school since 1982.

In an e-mail sent to residents and *The Westfield Leader*, Board President Anne Riegel stated, "Dr. Foley has recommended to the board that we not renew the lease for one more year."

"The district will be sending notice to UCESC this week. As such, the board will not need to vote on this item at our June 21 board of education meeting; an actual vote would only be necessary if we were planning to renew the lease," she said.

"The board of education is regretful that the situation has developed to this point," the e-mail read.

According to the terms of the lease, the UCESC must vacate the facility by June 30.

UCESC Superintendent Ed Hartnett told *The Leader* that the commission plans to petition the New Jersey Department of Education (DOE) commissioner's office of controversies and disputes for "emergent relief, which means we will be asking the commissioner to direct the Westfield Board of Education (BOE) to give us time to locate a new facility," he said.

According to the DOE website, the office of controversies and disputes is designed to assist Commissioner of Education Lucille Davey, a former

Westfield resident, in "fulfilling her responsibility to decide, through the contested case process, disputes arising under school law and regulations."

Mr. Hartnett said the UCESC had not received a formal notice as of June 19 from the Westfield BOE attorney. He said this notice must be submitted to the DOE commissioner in order for the UCESC to make a formal appeal of the BOE's decision.

Regarding the future of Hillcrest Academy South, Mr. Hartnett said, "Our students don't have a school now; it is very distressing to them. We are looking at available schools through the Archdiocese of Newark, which would be our first choice."

Sue Hopper and Lisa Stern, residents who live adjacent to Hillcrest South, told *The Leader*, "We are very pleased with the board's decision of non-renewal. However, we are cautiously optimistic about the results and question why the UCESC feels the need to appeal this decision."

"It's not just a matter of securing the safety of our neighborhood but getting space back that the Westfield schools desperately need. We intend on monitoring this action very closely to assure a satisfactory result for all involved."

One of the solutions residents suggested to the board was to move the existing population of Hillcrest South to Hillcrest North in Scotch Plains.

"Moving the students to that location will definitely not happen," Mr. Hartnett said. "Our contract with the Elizabeth School District is for 150 students, and the Hillcrest North campus holds nearly

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A TALE OF TWO HILLCRESTS...Hillcrest Academy South is located at Lincoln School on Westfield Avenue in Westfield, with Kehler Stadium visible in the background (left); Hillcrest Academy North is located on Plainfield Avenue in Scotch Plains (right). The Westfield Board of Education has opted to not renew the lease of Lincoln School to Hillcrest, operated by the Union County Educational Services Commission (UCESC). AM Educational Associates of Elizabeth owns the Scotch Plains property and has leased it to the UCESC since 1995.

Union County Educational Services Commission Budget More Than Double Since 1996

By DON WILLIAMS and DAVID RIGGS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Editor's Note: The operation of the Union County Educational Services Commission (UCESC), with facilities in Westfield and Scotch Plains,

has been discussed by the Westfield Board of Education (BOE) following the arrest of four students from the commission's Hillcrest Academy South campus in Westfield.

Budget and 10-year history data from the UCESC's 2005 annual report are included in this report. See Table 1 on page 10. An interview with UCESC Superintendent Edward Hartnett appears on page 10.

WESTFIELD — The UCESC operates schools at four locations in Westfield and Scotch Plains that cater to children with special needs. It also provides transportation for approximately 3,500 special-needs students from the county to other non-district schools, according to UCESC Superintendent Edward Hartnett.

UCESC accepts students from public and non-public school districts, both inside and outside the county. In 2005, its budget was \$38.2 million. In 1996, the budget was \$18.7 million.

Legislation such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 has increased the requirements (and costs) for special education. These increases can be seen in the Westfield and Scotch Plains-Fanwood districts, where special education now makes up nearly 15 to 20 percent of the school budget.

The chief administrator of the UCESC, Mr. Hartnett, will retire on June 30. Rahway School Superintendent William Petrino will replace Mr. Hartnett as superintendent.

According to the annual report, almost half of the UCESC 2005 budget (\$18,152,240) funded transportation for about 3,500 students both to UCESC schools and other special education schools all across New Jersey as required by students' Individualized Education Program. The instruction budget was \$8.5 million.

In 2005, 299 students were enrolled in UCESC schools, according to the annual report. In 1996, 285 students were enrolled, rising to a high of 366 in 2003 and then dropping in 2005.

Mr. Hartnett said that the UCESC has a contract with Elizabeth to educate 150 students at Hillcrest Academy. Thomas Beese, director of Special Services for the Scotch Plains-Fanwood schools, reports that nine students are in UCESC programs from his district, and Westfield Board of Education member Alice Hunnicut, who is also Westfield's UCESC's commissioner on its board of directors, reports that between 12 and 18 students from Westfield attend UCESC schools.

According to the UCESC website, ucesc.k12.nj.us, the UCESC was created in 1969 with special state legislation. As of now, all 21 county public school districts are members, although not all have voting privileges on the commission. In addition to the schools operated by the UCESC, the commission is also responsible for vocational education and special projects such as educating students at the Union County Juvenile Detention Center.

The commission officials are: President Frank Cicarell of Rahway, Vice President Thomas Bistocchi of Union County Vo-Tech, Helen Kirsch of Berkeley Heights, Henry Varriano of Clark, Camille Widdows of Cranford, Francisco Gonzalez of Elizabeth, Linda Koenig of Garwood, Nathalie Yafet of Hillside, Gerard Laudati (non-voting) of Kenilworth, Bryan Russell of Linden, Scott Worswick of Mountainside, John Wolak (non-voting) of New Providence, Lenny Cathcart, Jr. of Plainfield, Silvia Fonseca (non-voting) of Roselle, Katherine Panetta of Roselle Park, Craig Nowlin of Scotch Plains-Fanwood, Anthony Delia (non-voting) of Springfield, Patricia Calhoun (non-voting) of Summit, Linda Lewis (non-voting) of Union, Ms. Hunnicut of Westfield and Kathleen Wittrock of Winfield.

The schools operated by UCESC serve students with different special needs. Beadleston High School and Westlake School are located at 1571 Lamberts Mill Road in Westfield. Hillcrest Academy North is located at 2630 Plainfield Avenue in Scotch Plains, while Hillcrest Academy South is located at 728 Westfield Avenue.

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Summit HS Assistant Principal Rejects Offer for Westfield HS Principal Position

By MEGHAN GILL
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Summit High School (SHS) Assistant Principal Anthony Akey, told Westfield Board of Education (BOE) officials on Tuesday that he will not accept an offer to become the principal of Westfield High School (WHS). The BOE was

scheduled to vote to approve Mr. Akey's appointment to replace the retiring Robert Petix at last night's board meeting.

According to a statement released by Superintendent of Schools William Foley on Tuesday, Mr. Akey was not willing to relinquish the tenure that he now holds as assistant principal. He

has worked at SHS since 1980, where he started as a social studies teacher.

Mr. Foley said newly hired Westfield administrators are not granted tenure automatically. After holding a position for three years they receive a review and either receive or are denied tenure.

Mr. Foley announced that he would reopen the search for a new principal. "It is unfortunate that Mr. Akey did not accept the terms of the Westfield administrator contract," he said, "but we are confident that we will find the right match for Westfield High School without compromising the standards of our performance review process."

Board President Anne Riegel said that there was an initial 13-member committee made up of teachers, supervisors, students and a parent that met and interviewed four candidates. Three finalists were brought before the board for another interview round.

"Mr. Akey was the unanimous choice of all," she said.

"I am disappointed that he accepted our offer and then chose to back out. He seemed like a good candidate and he told the board how interested he was and how much he wanted the job," Ms. Riegel told *The Leader*.

On Friday, June 16, Mr. Foley told *The Leader* that the BOE had selected Mr. Akey to succeed Mr. Petix;

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Cupcakes In, Candy Out: GW BOE Reviews Nutrition

By CASSIE LO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD — The Garwood Board of Education (BOE) discussed a new wellness and nutrition regulation for the school system at its monthly meeting Tuesday night.

"Cupcakes are in," said board member Gary Maher as he began the discussion with a summary of the education committee's findings, which included rules about food items in schools. The new regulations, which will go into effect September 1, include a district-wide candy ban and limiting birthday celebrations to kindergarten through third-grade students.

When asked why the celebrations could not continue through fifth grade, Superintendent Wilfred Murphy said, "The administration recommends that we stop after the third grade." In addition, students will be prohibited from distributing birthday treats to other teachers or administration because it is "very disruptive," according to Superintendent Murphy.

Teachers have been instructed to only reward students with non-food items. Food will be permitted, however, for instructional use, such as learning about cultures. The food regulations do not apply after school hours at school functions, but soda is banned district-wide. The board will further revise the plans at its Tuesday, July 18 meeting.

In other news, the BOE is looking into revising the aftercare program

provided by the Westfield Y. An option for students to stay at Lincoln School instead of being transported to the Y is being considered. Also, the borough's library, located in the Lincoln School complex, is currently accepting donations for its book drive. Books can be dropped off during regular library hours.

"Hopefully this will be an annual event for the library," said board member Christine Guerriero.

During the superintendent's report, Mr. Murphy announced that 46 eighth-grade students graduated from the Garwood school system on Monday. The Arthur L. Johnson High School (ALJ) graduation will take place at the Clark school today at 7 p.m. Garwood sends its high school students to ALJ.

DWC Board of Directors Discusses Outdoor Renovations, Walkway Grants

By DAVID RIGGS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The Downtown Westfield Corporation (DWC) voted to approve several new downtown construction requests, originally made to the DWC's design committee, during its monthly board of directors meeting Monday morning.

Three voting board members attended the 8 a.m. meeting, along with

DWC Chairman David Martone and Executive Director Sherri Cronin.

Multiple community members were invited but did not attend the meeting, including Councilman Jim Foerst and Sergeant Scott Rodger of the Westfield Police Department, according to the meeting's minutes.

The board voted to approve new brick work on the facade of the Rialto Theatre on East Broad Street and then discussed and voted on proposed plans to renovate the front of Jersey Mike's Sub Shop on East Broad Street.

Jersey Mike's is currently undertaking an expansion into the neighboring barber shop, which closed due to the owner's death. Due to this interior expansion, Jersey Mike's plans to change its front sign to fit the new space the store will occupy, Ms. Cronin said.

"This is one of the best design projects we have on our plate," board member Joe Spector said. "If we demonstrate what could be done, we can make that side of East Broad Street really pop."

Instead of one large sign, Jersey Mike's has proposed outdoor changes that would put smaller, circular signs on the windows, as well as a series of small awnings across the storefront.

Jersey Mike's also plans to keep one of the old barber poles, while tearing down the other one.

The proposed outdoor renovations to Jersey Mike's require a variance from the town's board of adjustment; the DWC voted its approval of the project. Now the project now goes back to the design committee for approval of the outdoor construction work.

"If they agree to do this, it's a wonderful thing," Mr. Spector said.

Following votes on multiple other outdoor construction plans for various stores, the board members turned to the issue of giving grants for walkways, specifically one located next to Video Video on Elm Street, which is going out of business and will be replaced by a toy store in the near future, Mr. Martone said.

"We should put a square-foot price on it," board member Dominick Verdic said. "End it [the grant] at 10,000 square-feet to protect ourselves."

Mr. Martone said that these grants and requirements should only apply to pedestrian common areas, such as the walkway adjacent to Video Video; other DWC board members agreed.

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Council Conducts Hearing On Verizon Cable Proposal

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — At a public meeting Tuesday, the town council heard a proposal by Verizon to construct and operate a fiber-optic telecommunications network, passed an ordinance fixing annual salaries and heard a presentation from the White Paper Committee.

During the public hearing, Verizon officials cited a need for municipal consent in order to become a competitive cable provider with Comcast. Verizon officials outlined a plan to upgrade the town's existing copper-based cables with fiber-optic ones to accommodate a new telecommunications network including television and Internet connectivity.

Edward Butts, Verizon's franchise manager, said Verizon is "not seeking to replace the incumbent provider. We believe competition is good for the Town of Westfield." He said the fiber-optic cables are "impervious to the elements" because they do not conduct electricity and are "more reliable than the existing infrastructure."

First Ward Councilman Sal Caruana and Second Ward Councilwoman Jo Ann Neylan questioned the extent of the work and the impact it would have on residents. Mark Bocchieri, Verizon's director of External Affairs, said that "Verizon would move quickly with little negative impact upon residents." He said Verizon's intent is to "leave the town in the condition

they found it." Mr. Bocchieri said it could take up to five years to complete the entire municipality.

In other business, the council passed on second reading an ordinance governing annual salaries for the mayor, council and certain appointed officers.

The ordinance passed by a vote of 7-1. Fourth Ward Councilman Tom Bigosinski voted no and Third Ward Councilman Dave Haas was absent. Councilman Bigosinski told *The Westfield Leader* that he did not support the ordinance because it did not call for a competitive-bidding

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High School Holds Graduation Today

WESTFIELD — Westfield High School (WHS) will hold graduation ceremonies at 6 p.m. today, June 22, behind the school on the field bordering Rahway Avenue.

In the event of inclement weather, graduation will be held at the Armory, and a notice will be posted on WHS-TV36 in the afternoon.

The keynote speaker for the commencement ceremony will be former WHS student and New York Giants running back Butch Woolfolk.

More than 400 seniors are expected to receive diplomas. Later that evening, the BASH, an all-night substance-free graduation party sponsored by the Optimist Club of Westfield, will be held at the Ricochet Health and Racquet Club.



SPRING CLEANING...Westfield residents who have purchased special permits through the town's curbside waste program can dispose of unwanted items.

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