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EDUCATION

State OKs teacher-prep program

Relay Graduate School fast-tracks certification; aimed at cities, minority educators

By Linda Conner Lambeck

A controversial alternative route to certification that promises to put more minority teachers into classrooms received approval from the state Wednesday.

The program, Relay

Graduate School of Education, was challenged by a number of teachers and officials from established teacher preparation programs in the state who said it would hurt more than it would help if it puts unprepared teachers in front of students of color.

"We can do better than

this," Mia Dimbo, a Bridgeport teacher, said of the program.

Others, including Commissioner of Education Dianna Wentzell, said Relay is just another tool that would not compete with established teacher prep programs, but would provide another on-ramp for

those who don't have the time or money for the traditional route.

"This is part of a solution to a number of our challenges," Wentzell said. "This is not an either-or moment. This is a both-and moment."

The program already has a presence in Waterbury,

Norwalk and New Haven. Soon it will have one in Bridgeport, Norman Atkins, owner of Relay, told the state board before the program was granted a two-year approval.

One board member, Erin Benham, voted "no."

The program currently **See Teachers on A4**

"This is part of a solution to a number of our challenges. This is not an either-or moment."

Dianna Wentzell, commissioner of education

ENVIRONMENT

Rainfall won't yet recharge reservoirs

By Ken Borsuk

GREENWICH — Heavy rains on Thursday and Sunday gave Greenwich the soaking it had been waiting for, but the impact on the region's ongoing drought was minimal.

Last Monday, the town's reservoir level was at 26.2 percent capacity and town Conservation Director Denise Savageau reported on Tuesday that, even after the two bouts of heavy rain, the reservoir was still down to 26.1 percent.

"Even after all that rain this is still a major issue," Savageau said. "There are such dry conditions that when we do get rain like we did, it just runs off. What we need is more rain so the ground isn't so dry (and) it's going to soak into the ground and

See Rain on A4



Tyler Sizemore / Hearst Connecticut Media

Despite two days of rain, the level at the Putnam Reservoir and other town reservoirs has not been helped.

Former school board chairmen sound off on charter change

By Ken Borsuk

GREENWICH — A handful of former Board of Education chairmen has joined several current school board members to give a thumbs-down to a move to increase the size of the body.

"Changing the size is a bad idea," former chairman Sandra Waters told members of the town's Charter Change Committee on Tuesday. "It adds extra complexity to the interactions among board members and will prolong discussion and prolong meetings, and I think it could also diminish the quality of board members."

"It's hard to recruit effective and strong board members. And when you have 10, that means you're recruiting more and

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Danielle Robinson Calloway / For Hearst Connecticut Media

Sarah Mead, director of marketing communications, and Julie Marie Frye, librarian, show student requests for what they would like to make inside the new maker space being built at the Whitby School library.

"This is really a place where students ... just experiment and play and tinker"

Tim Schwartz, Whitby director of innovation

Whitby School joins maker movement

Constructs room in library for hands-on learning, creative tinkering



Situ Studio's Ryan Kahen, project designer, and Sam Keene, lead fabricator, work on the new maker space inside the Whitby School library.

By Emilie Munson

GREENWICH — So far, Whitby School's new maker space looks like the ribs of a gargantuan prehistoric beast rising out of the library floor.

The space, intended to allow students to design and build whatever they desire, occupies a quarter of the school's library.

By last week, a skeleton of wooden arching beams connected by a rounded countertop separated the maker space from the library. Once completed, students will use the room's 3-D printer, vinyl cutter, laser cutter, milling machine and sewing machine to create projects.

"This is really a place where



The plan for the new maker space.

students of all ages, as well as parents and teachers, can come and have access to a variety of different resources and tools and just experiment and play and tinker," said Tim Schwartz, Whitby's director

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TEACHERS

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operates in nine other states, officials said.

The proposal, revised several times since it was proposed in February, will allow Relay to grant teaching degrees to individuals, most of whom are already working in schools, usually as teacher aides. It takes a year to complete the program and will lead to certification in elementary

education as well as English, math, science, biology, chemistry and physics at the secondary level.

Connecticut already has three alternative-route certification programs, two run by state entities and one by Teach for America.

Dimbo said the state would do better to expand its own programs. Last year, Bridgeport initiated a minority teacher recruitment program for paraprofessionals. The program was short-

circuited when grant funds ran out.

Rebecca Good, who came to Connecticut to run Relay in the state, said the program has no intention of putting unqualified teachers into classrooms.

"We are looking to be part of the solution," she said, noting that 52 of the program's 66 aspiring teachers are people of color.

Robert Trefry, an ex-officio member of the state board who was chairman of the Bridgeport Board of Education when that

panel was taken over by the state, said the fact that the program's students already work in the schools is a positive.

"You will end up with people who will stay," Trefry said.

Stephen Wright, a state Board of Education member from Trumbull, said the program was a great opportunity for employees who can't afford to take time off from work.

"College presidents know something needs to change in the current certification process,"

Wright said.

Robert Hannafin, dean of Fairfield University's Graduate School of Education, countered that the change to attract and keep great teachers shouldn't be misguided. He questioned the speed of the approval process and wondered why the program didn't at least warrant a probationary approval.

"Relay is a poorly conceived preparation program," Hannafin said. "We don't need Relay in Connecticut. What we need is to take the long view."

MAKER

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of innovation.

The possibility of a maker space has been on the minds of Whitby teachers for the past six or seven years, because design is one of the focuses of the school's International Baccalaureate curriculum, Schwartz said.

As the "maker movement," an umbrella term for independent inventors, tinkerers and designers, moved into the national consciousness about five years ago, interest in a maker space at Whitby grew, he said.

About a year and half ago, interest solidified into action, and Whitby hired Brooklyn-based SITU Stu-



Danielle Robinson Calloway / For Hearst Connecticut Media

Julie Marie Frye, librarian, on Friday explains the plan for the new maker space being built at the Whitby School library.

dio to design and build the project.

Members of the school community gave input on the design. Schwartz said one eager third-grader came to his office with a spreadsheet of all the machines he

would like to see in the maker space, many so advanced that Schwartz had never heard of them.

"Our dream scenario is a whole army of students that inspired, that curious, that passionate about what

they're going to do in here," Schwartz said.

Parts of the maker space arrived by rental truck on Oct. 25 and a SITU crew was expected to spend about two weeks assembling it.

The space is scheduled for completion Friday.

"What makes this unique among the other independent schools around here is that we've actually purposefully hired an architectural firm to create a space inside of a larger space," Schwartz said. "What you'll see in a lot of other schools is just repurposing an existing classroom and throwing a bunch of equipment in there."

The school raised about \$75,000 at its 2016 spring benefit to fund the project. The remaining funding came from the school's oper-

ating budget, said Schwartz, who declined to give a total price tag.

The school will acquire more machines incrementally based on student demand, he said.

School officials intend for any age student to use the maker space. The wooden frame for the area has a tunnel, nook-style cubbies and even a small climbing wall built in.

"They're trying to find a balance between functional and also fun for the kids," said Sarah Mead, Whitby's director of marketing and communications.

Students will be able to use the space during free time, recess, lunch, after school or with their classes.

Whitby librarian Julie-Marie Frye said the maker

space will not impede the library's traditional function. The school hired a specialized space planner to reconfigure the library to maximize space.

"We have this vision that the maker space wouldn't be entirely separate from the library," she said.

Schwartz said the new area reflects Whitby's emphasis on process.

"It's the process that the kids are going to go through in building the things that they build that will be of the most value to them," he said. "The inspirations and the opportunities that are provided here actually overflow into the classrooms in their daily academic work."

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RAIN

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have an impact."

A little of that additional rain is likely for Thursday. According to the National Weather Service, there is a 60 percent chance of showers along with warmer-than-average temperatures, with rain continuing through the evening. The weekend's forecast is for cooler temperatures and sun.

According to Savageau, the northern part of Green-

wich into Stamford is getting less rain than other areas in town. There was about 0.72 inches of rain at the Putnam Reservoir on Sunday and 1.2 inches measured in Byram.

Including last Thursday's rains, October measured between three and four inches, about average for the month but not enough to make up for the summer's dryness.

"We're glad it rained," Savageau said. "We'll take whatever we can get, but we're not done with this yet."

According to Aquarion Water Company's Public Relations Director Peter Fazekas, "We need about 10 inches of rain to get us into more of a normal mode of operation."

Western Connecticut is under its first ever official drought watch after a declaration made last week by Gov. Dannel P. Malloy. Residents across the state are asked to conserve water and limit unnecessary usage whenever possible.

Greenwich has been under mandatory restrictions since September. Only

the Board of Selectmen has the power to lift the restrictions.

"We are grateful that Greenwich residents and businesses continue to adhere to the Phase 2 water use ban and restrictions," First Selectman Peter Tesesi said. "Since the ... water use ban on Oct. 6, the town's water consumption, via Aquarion, has been reduced from about 18 million gallons per day to about seven million gallons per day, but the town remains at a rainfall deficit of 10 inches. With the approaching winter season and inherent freezing of both the ground and water surfaces, unless there is significant rainfall during the next several weeks, I do

not envision the Board of Selectmen lifting the restrictions anytime soon."

According to the town, the police have investigated 279 reports of water restriction violations since the ban went into effect. Of those, only one fine has been issued and 126 formal warnings handed out. The police request anyone who sees a violation of the restrictions to call 203-622-8004.

Savageau said a heavy winter snow and ice fall would provide recharge into the ground once it melts. But because water usage typically declines in the winter no need to water lawns it is harder to conserve or restrict.

Savageau said the town would continue to monitor water use and supply, working with Aquarion and the state's Department of Public Health to track the water levels.

"We're hopeful we will have a lot of precipitation over the winter," Fazekas said. "But we need to be ready if we don't."

Fazekas said Aquarion is encouraging people to take shorter showers, run washing machines and dishwashers only when full and fix leaks in toilets, showers and sinks.

"We will continue to be working with town officials in Greenwich, Stamford, Darien and New Canaan on this," Fazekas said.

CHARTER

From page A1

you're going to have even more difficulty, which I think will reduce the likelihood of choice."

The committee is exploring a potential charter change recommendation that would increase the size of the Board of Education from eight to 10, with five members elected every odd year from a pool of six: three Republicans, three Democrats.

The committee is considering a proposal to have a fifth seat added to the 2017 municipal election. Another seat would be added in 2019.

Supporters have said the increase would create more accountability and competition.

Critics have said the proposed change would politicize the board, which is evenly split between political parties. An odd number of candidates would put one political party in charge, they said.

Six former school board chairmen Republicans Waters, Genevieve Krob, Nancy Weisler, Steve Anderson and Colleen Giambo and Democrat Leslie Moriarty spoke.

Krob said she didn't believe increasing the size would do anything for is-

sues people claim are driving the effort: the cost of labor contracts, controversy over electing a board chairman and the effort to find a new superintendent for the long term.

"I don't think a change in the number or composition of the board is going to be a magical solution to all those problems," she said. "The end goal should be a better board of ed. What we're talking about here is one means and it's part of a larger puzzle. I don't know if it's the most important piece so it has to be considered in the context of all the other things that are going on."

On the other hand, Weisler, a current member of the town's Board of Estimate and Taxation, said she believed the expansion could be a good thing.

"It would promote greater accountability and better choice," Weisler said. "The current system relies on political party affiliation as one of the key criteria for the election and at the end of the day party affiliation can trump a candidate's qualifications."

Weisler also said she believed more members would reduce the workload and, in contrast to Waters, said it would end up attracting better candidates to serve.

Anderson suggested increasing the board to nine members.

Last month, the committee heard from current school board members who, except for member Peter Sherr, panned the proposal.

But that discussion touched on another issue: an increasingly diverse voting pattern in town.

The most recent voter registration numbers in Greenwich show there are nearly as many unaffiliated voters as registered Republicans, whose numbers traditionally overshadow registered Democrats.

"I think it's a real flaw with this proposal," Giambo said. "We can't assume we only have Democrats and Republicans, and I think we need to increase competitiveness with unaffiliated voters. ... I'd rather see a proposal that addresses that."

Charter Change Committee chairman Joan Caldwell and committee member Barry Rickert, who is unaffiliated, both said the committee was taking a hard look at getting more unaffiliated members of the town involved.

A process does exist for someone who is unaffiliated to get on the ballot as a petition candidate, they said, but they run at a disadvantage compared with those running with town political party support.

"We're really looking at everything," Caldwell said.

If the committee recommends a change to the board's size, the measure would go to the Board of Selectmen. If the selectmen approve it, it would then go to the Representative Town Meeting for a final vote.

A public hearing is scheduled for 7 p.m. Nov. 9 at a location to be announced.

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