



## Education Chair Report

By Ed Linz

*Ed Linz, our WKCA Education Chairperson met with three Principals for our local schools in May of 2013. Below is his report to the community on those meetings:*

I met with Mr. Jason Pensler, the Principal of **Orange Hunt Elementary School**, in his office for 40 minutes on May 16. I congratulated him that the school and the grounds were well-maintained and the security system seemed to be solid (I had to be “buzzed” in to gain entry). In response to my first question, “What three things would you like to tell our community about OHES?” he responded, (1) our German immersion program is superb. About 1/3 of the students in grades 1-6 are involved, receiving instruction daily in German in math, science and health, (2) our teachers (there are 29) are excellent, and (3) the community has been very supportive. He also told me that the typical class size is 25 in grades 1-2, and 30 or less in grades 3-6. Currently, there are about 800 students in the school. There is an emphasis on technology in the classrooms, with a “smart board” in every classroom. There are 6 mobile labs (each has 10-16 laptops in it) available for use, in addition to many computers in each room. He thinks that the county will allow students this coming year to bring their own tablets and laptops for use in the classroom, but this has not yet been finalized. [Recommend parents check on this at the beginning of school!]. If a police officer is needed, he has the ability to obtain assistance from Washington Irving Intermediate or West Springfield HS. He has one Assistant Principal, Sarah Brooks; both he and Ms. Brooks have been at Orange Hunt for 2 years. Overall, I came away impressed.

I met with Mr. Mark Greenfelder, the Principal at **West Springfield High School (WSHS)**, in his office for 45 minutes on May 17. The main information he wanted to share with the community concerned the long-sought renovation of the school. Planning has begun, with a target date of the summer of 2016 for work to commence. It is projected to be a 3-yr long process with the construction of a new science wing and a new gym. All other areas will be extensively renovated; the cost is projected to be \$70-80 million. This will be a massive project, but contrary to some rumors, there will not be an entirely new school constructed on what is now the football field. Many classes will, of course, be taught in temporary facilities (trailers) during this process. WSHS will be the first high school renovated under new FCPS specifications. He also was very proud of a recent U.S. News and World report ranking WSHS as one of the top 10 high schools in Virginia. I congratulated him on this, but pointed out that WSHS was still ranked 8<sup>th</sup> in Fairfax County. Currently, there are approximately 2,300 students at WSHS, and several times he told me that test scores were “up across the board.” I might note that this statement is a rather selective interpretation of SOL, SAT, and AP scores, but I did not debate the point. His main concern for the future is the ongoing School Board debate concerning how disciplinary issues will be handled. Mr. Greenfelder’s concern was whether Principals and Assistant Principals will be permitted to talk to a student about behavioral problems. It appears that he will have to contact parents of any student to obtain their permission prior to discussing behavioral issues with a student. Mr. Greenfelder stressed to me how important it is for parents and citizens to make their feelings known to School Board members on these issues. Our school board member is Elizabeth Schultz, 703-423-1080, or email, [Elizabeth.Schultz@fcps.edu](mailto:Elizabeth.Schultz@fcps.edu).

I met with the Principal at **Washington Irving Middle School (WIMS)**, Mr. Danny Little, on May 29. He has been at Irving for the past 9 years. His main objective, he said, was to stress the Core Values/Beliefs of WIMS, around which he attempts to manage the school. This involves teaching with the Professional Learning Community System (teachers work collaboratively) and the belief that all students can be successful. The bottom line is that essentially every student will complete Irving in two years and proceed on to WSHS. Accordingly, students are allowed multiple opportunities to take the same test, and students cannot receive a zero even if they do not submit assigned work or take a test. However, Mr. Little stressed that students must complete their work, and this is often done during the lunch break. It was unclear how this is enforced. This fall there will be approximately 1,000 students at Irving, and the average class size is 27. Mr. Little gave me a tour of the building. It was very clean and quiet and students were engaged. I was particularly impressed with the tech area, which now has a 3-D printer (which was in use). About 5-6 students per year proceed to Thomas Jefferson, with essentially everyone else headed to WSHS. Mr. Little stressed the need for parental involvement, which often falls off after grade school.

Bottom line: Winston Knolls residents continue to be blessed with reasonably good public schools. I strongly recommend that parents closely monitor what is taking place, and what is not taking place in your own children’s classrooms. **The more you are involved, the better our schools will be.**