

GREENWICH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Greenwich, Connecticut

Date of Meeting: November 1, 2012

Title of Item:

Racial Imbalance – Discussion and Possible Action on Potential Strategies

REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION OR PRESENTATION OF INFORMATION ITEMS

 Action Required

 x **Informational Only**

Submitted By: Dr. William McKersie

Position: Superintendent

I will be present at Board Meeting to explain if called upon:

 x **YES** **NO**

Synopsis of Proposal: Materials to Follow

Recommended Action (if appropriate):

October 26, 2012

To: Board of Education, Greenwich Public Schools
From: William S. McKersie, Ph.D., Superintendent
RE: Update #2 on “Improving Student Learning and Racial Balance”

Background

The Board of Education had an extensive discussion about Racial Balance at the October 18, 2012 BOE Work Session. The discussion addressed three major areas:

1. Summary of conclusions from two recent meetings between Commissioner Stefan Pryor and Dr. McKersie
2. Review of demographic, enrollment and facility usage data
3. Introduction of the known universe of solutions Modify existing magnets
 - a) Establish and/or modify new magnets
 - b) Controlled choice in a region or district-wide
 - c) School closing
 - d) Redistricting (attendance zone modification)
 - e) Charter schools
 - f) Contract schools
 - g) Compact schools

Based on the October 18 discussion, the BOE requested that the GPS Administration provided additional analysis on the known universe of solutions at the November 1, 2012 BOE Meeting.

Analysis of Solutions

The GPS Administration examined seven potential solutions to the district’s racial imbalance problem. The solutions track to the set discussed in the October 18 BOE meeting, but have been reorganized into categories to make analysis and discussion more effective. It is important to note that the solutions represent the full universe of known options and reflect no prioritization by the GPS Administration. The solution categories include:

1. Magnet Schools – Both full and partial magnets
2. Autonomous Schools – Including charter schools, contract schools and compact schools
3. Redistricting – Including school closings
4. Grade Reorganization – Added as an option based on BOE discussion
5. Controlled Choice
6. Out of District Tuition – Added as an option based on BOE discussion
7. Combined Solution – Developing an approach drawing on one or more of the preceding options

For each solution category, the analysis provides a brief description, lists related costs, highlights likely impact on student learning, and notes a set of pros and cons. The analysis does not list numeric data; the review is qualitative.

One Next Step: Addressing Technical Questions

A major theme across the solution categories is the need for comprehensive analysis of several technical questions. Central to any racial balance solution, they also are a factor for the GPS more generally. They include:

- Demographics
- Housing
- Enrollment Patterns and Projections
- Classroom Facilities
- School Choice Plans
- Transportation
- Budget Implications

These issues are well understood as key factors by the GPS Board and Administration. We have data for each area and a good deal of preliminary analysis. However, we lack the technical capacity and dedicated personnel to develop a viable plan. Conversations with Dr. Evan Pitkoff of the Cooperative Educational Services (CES) and potential consultants have generated several possible approaches to advancing the GPS's data and analysis with intensive work by external experts. As a result, the Administration plans to develop and release an RFP to select a consultant team that can provide comprehensive analysis of these critical issues. We would welcome the BOE's comments on this necessary and timely next step.

Greenwich Public Schools
Range of Options for Improving Student Learning and Increasing Racial Balance
(Includes Full Range of Known Options without Prioritization)

Option	Description	Related Costs	Impact on Racial Balance	Impact on Student Learning	Pros	Cons
Magnet Schools	<p>Redistribute students across attendance areas through a voluntary application process where parents are provided with an opportunity to send their child to either a neighborhood school or a theme-based magnet school (e.g., I.B., S.T.E.M., Arts, Foreign Language Immersion).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full magnets do not have attendance areas and draw all of their students through the application/lottery process (would require extensive redistricting in Greenwich) • Partial magnets fill the available seats in a “neighborhood school” after all of the students living in the attendance area have been accommodated (current model) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographic, enrollment and facility consulting • Theme exploration and development • Theme based staffing • Theme based equipment and/or instructional materials • Accreditation fees • Professional learning • Management of marketing and application process • Extended school day • Transportation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since movement to a magnet school is voluntary and selection is not based on race, possibilities range from improving racial balance to increasing racial imbalance • Current magnet plan “weights” the chances of students by the demographics of their home attendance area and the “probability” that an applicant from that attendance area will improve the racial balance of the magnet school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependent on the focus of the magnet theme and its implementation • Many magnet themes seek to engage students in interdisciplinary, higher order critical thinking that is aligned with Common Core standards or the District Vision of the Graduate but will not necessarily be measured by current mandated assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movement is voluntary • Provides parents with choice (neighborhood versus magnet) • Entails minimal or no redistricting • Depending on how magnet schools are implemented, protects the concept of traditional neighborhood schools • Potential to create “schools of innovation” where instructional approaches and frameworks can be piloted and evaluated before being implemented across the entire district 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No guarantee that a magnet program will improve racial balance • In partial magnet schools, increased enrollment within the neighborhood attendance area decreases available magnet seats • Depending on the magnet theme, the costs can be significant compared to the other options • Extended period of time is required to develop and implement a new magnet school • Could create the perception of inequality between magnet and non-magnet schools (per pupil expenditure, special programs or additional educational opportunities) • If magnet program is superior, why is it not being implemented across the entire district? • Full magnets potentially undermine community agency support and partnerships with schools (may eliminate schools as neighborhood centers and partners)

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Autonomous Schools (local “charter” school)	Board of Education enters into a contract or compact with an outside organization (teachers’ union, university, not-for-profit, or private contractor) to run one or more of the district’s schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographic, enrollment and facility consulting • Legal assistance in developing request for proposal (RFP) and executing contract 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negligible unless combined with another option such as magnet schools or controlled choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research is mixed on the impact of autonomous public schools on student achievement (e.g., charter schools) • In the evaluation of autonomous schools, it is difficult to control for the self-selection by students (parents) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potentially lowers per pupil costs • Introduces an entrepreneurial element into a “closed” system, which may promote a greater range of successful teaching and learning approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases the complexity of District oversight by Board of Education • Legal ramifications of operating an autonomous school and meeting statutory requirements • Potentially undermines community agency support and partnerships with schools (may eliminate schools as neighborhood centers and partners)
Redistricting	<p>Redraw attendance areas to balance student demographics among schools (e.g., race/ethnicity or free/reduced price lunch).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full redistricting achieves racial balance by reconfiguring school attendance areas • Partial redistricting could be used to increase available seats in existing magnet schools • Closing a school could be used to create space for a full magnet school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographic, enrollment and facility consulting • Transportation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieves racial balance or any other population distribution objective (by Federal law, redistricting must not disproportionately impact minority students) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does moving a student from one school to another school improve student achievement provided the curriculum, resources and quality of instruction are equivalent from school to school? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option most likely to succeed in increasing racial balance among schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involuntary with high potential for public or legal controversy • Full redistricting to achieve racial balance would impact all schools and up to one quarter of elementary students • Difficult to redistrict for racial balance and maintain traditional neighborhood schools • Future changes in demographics may force additional redistricting to maintain racial balance • Creates instability in the real estate market

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Grade Reorganization	Reconstitute two or more elementary and/or middle schools into a new grade configuration (e.g., K-8, K-2 and 3-5 or K-4 and 5-8).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographic, enrollment and facility consulting • Transportation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depending on which schools were paired, combined attendance area could substantially improve racial balance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potentially addresses the achievement “dip” during the transition from elementary to middle school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary/intermediate model would reduce variance in class size by increasing number of sections of a grade in one building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased transportation costs • Disproportionately impacts some school communities
Controlled Choice	Upon registering in the school district, parents indicate 1 st , 2 nd , and 3 rd choice schools. Student is assigned to one of those three choices. In the case where the number of students applying exceeds the number of seats in a school, a lottery would be used to determine pupil assignment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographic, enrollment and facility consulting • management of marketing and application process • transportation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theoretically would increase racial balance because every parent is required to make a choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While not increasing overall achievement, could reduce the variance in achievement from school to school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficiently distributes students across schools reducing or eliminating variance in class size • Provides parents with choice (albeit limited choice) • If “grandfathered” would take years to improve racial balance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the potential to significantly increase the cost and complexity of transportation • Eliminates neighborhood schools • If not “grandfathered” would impact every elementary student and family in the district • Potentially undermines community agency support and partnerships with schools (may eliminate schools as neighborhood centers and partners)
Out of District Tuition	Fill available seats in any school by lifting the Board of Education moratorium on admitting tuition students who reside outside of Greenwich and are not town employees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depends on the location of available seats and the race of the tuition student 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negligible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate revenue for the town and school district from “unused” capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not focus on either improving achievement and/or increasing racial balance

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Combined Options	<p>The probability that any of these options will succeed in increasing racial balance is improved by selectively combining them together.</p> <p>For example:</p> <p>Partial Magnet Option</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create space in existing magnets by moving selected fifth grades into middle school and adjusting attendance boundaries • Strengthen magnet themes (S.T.E.M., university affiliation?) • Offer onsite extended day programs at magnet schools • Create an early childhood center in a K-4 school with the option for out of attendance area prekindergarten students to continue in that school • Fill magnets seats that are available after the application/lottery process with out of district tuition students • Open Western Middle School to magnet students • Provide transportation to all prekindergarten centers and magnet students 					

Critical Questions:

A number of critical questions already are known, each of which will have to be addressed in the planning and development process. The GPS Administration is keeping a running list of the most significant questions:

1. What will be the budget implications in the coming academic year (2013-14) and how will we accurately include them in the budget by December 2012 (well before planning is completed)?
2. What will be the elements of a school choice program to ensure it is efficient, effective and allows for both neighborhood and district-wide enrollment preferences?
3. To what extent will any new solution serve to attract students to and from the areas that are now racially isolated?
4. Which option provides the longest-term solution?
5. What is the most effective and efficient process for the Board of Education to select a new approach to racial balance?
6. What is the most effective and efficient way to include parent and community involvement in the process?
7. In identifying potential solutions, to what extent is the Board of Education using multiple measures of student learning to judge the merits of an option?
8. What is the most effective process for developing a comprehensive facility usage and enrollment management plan?
9. How will the Board of Education manage interactions with the State Board of Education regarding the timing for developing and implementing solutions?
10. To what extent will pending Federal legal cases about race-based enrollment and school choice programs affect the state statute?