

GREENWICH PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
Greenwich, Connecticut

Date of Meeting May 1, 2014

Title of Item: Presentation of Draft Racial Balance Plan

REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION OR PRESENTATION OF INFORMATION ITEMS

Action required

Informational only

Submitted By Dr. McKersie

Position Superintendent

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

Yes

No

Synopsis of Proposal:

Recommended Action:

Stefan Pryor  
Commissioner of Education  
State of Connecticut  
State Board of Education  
P.O. Box 2219  
Hartford, CT 06145

Dear Commissioner Pryor:

The Greenwich Board of Education submits the following plan to address racial balance within the District. The goal of the plan is to continue to stabilize racial balance at New Lebanon School and Hamilton Avenue Schools, while simultaneously focusing on our key priorities: achievement gaps among high needs student subgroups and capacity issues across all eleven elementary schools. Improving the academic performance in these two schools should attract more magnet students.

The rationale for this approach emerged over 18 months of data gathering, analysis, and community discussion. The Greenwich Board of Education is committed to achievement for all students. During its research and discussion, the Board committed to actions that have a positive impact on academic achievement and racial balance. After numerous public forums, discussions and deliberations, we have achieved a community consensus around the following understandings. These understandings form the basis for the Board's plan going forward:

- Greenwich deliberately chose to build a single large high school (2600+ students) that all public school students in the community attend. Our high school students have the benefit of a diverse student body and a rich array of challenging programs.
- The three feeder middle schools are racially balanced.
- The eleven neighborhood elementary schools are highly valued for their capacity to provide a sense of community. Neighborhood schools are strongly supported by parents across the town.
- Greenwich is a large district (58 square miles) with 16 educational facilities, extended bus routes and congestion along the I-95/Post Road corridor where most of the town's population is concentrated. Transporting students outside of their neighborhood elementary attendance area represents a significant expense and would require young children to be transported longer distances posing challenges for parents to be involved with their student's education.
- Rapid increases in the number of school age children residing within the New Lebanon School attendance area created overcrowding issues that impact the number of magnet students able to attend this school. This population trend was not anticipated when New Lebanon was first designated a magnet school in 2007, before the economic downturn.

- Involuntary movement of students to achieve racial balance through redistricting has no significant support in Greenwich
- The current partial magnet program is successful in promoting racial balance in two of four magnet schools (Julian Curtiss School and International School at Dundee). The other two magnet school neighborhoods were more significantly impacted by demographic changes after the economic downturn, limiting the movement of students.
- Expanding or reconfiguring the current magnet program has the potential to address racial balance and facility utilization issues.
- There is a small percentage of elementary parents who would consider sending their children to a magnet school outside of their attendance area if transportation were provided and the educational opportunities were attractive.
- High needs students (free or reduced price lunch, English Language Learners, receiving Special Education services) are disproportionately African American and Latino. Academic achievement is a key priority for the Board of Education and in the best interests of minority students. It is unlikely that moving high needs students to a more racially balanced school will, in and of itself, significantly close gaps in achievement.
- The State Statute regarding racial imbalance is silent as to student achievement. Nonetheless, the Greenwich Board of Education and Administration came to consensus in early September 2012 that any and all work by the Greenwich Public Schools on racial imbalance should first and foremost seek to raise student achievement and narrow the achievement gap among high needs sub groups.

The revised Greenwich Racial Balance Plan has several elements based on our understanding of the issue and our desire to provide the best possible education for all students. The revised plan builds off the plan submitted in 2007 that included four partial magnet elementary schools, (Hamilton Avenue, International School at Dundee, Julian Curtiss and New Lebanon), and New Lebanon being named an IB school. What follows is a long term, sustainable and multifaceted approach to addressing recent demographic trends and closing gaps in achievement among student subgroups:

1. Implement programs and services focused on accelerating achievement for all students while narrowing the achievement gap at New Lebanon School, Hamilton Avenue School and Julian Curtiss Schools, three of our four partial magnet schools that are all Title I schools. Programs to be targeted are: K-3 reading, technology to personalize instruction, data to drive instruction, programs to increase parent involvement and other strategies focused on achievement. It would be expected that this programming would make the three Title I magnet schools more attractive for new magnet families. Planning for these new programs has already begun with \$650,000 budgeted funds to continue development of programs and begin implementation during the 2014-15 school year.

2. Renovate and expand New Lebanon School to create up to 25% additional magnet seats, serve the increasing neighborhood enrollment and support a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment. In order for a magnet program at New Lebanon to work, it is essential the facility be upgraded to provide sufficient number of classrooms and support spaces for all programs. This renovation and expansion are key components of the proposed plan.
3. Implement and market a new magnet theme for Hamilton Avenue School, rebuilt in 2008, that will accelerates academic achievement. This modification will allow a sharper focus on achievement for all students and provide a strong attraction for additional magnet students.
4. Create a partial magnet school at Western Middle School with its middle years International Baccalaureate (IB) program. Greenwich students have the opportunity to experience the IB primary years program at two of Greenwich's magnet schools – New Lebanon School and International School at Dundee. Continuing this program into middle school is expected to encourage more families to choose to be a magnet family at both the elementary and secondary levels.
5. Modify the rules for the existing partial magnet school programs to encourage more voluntary movement within the district.

Further background information and the steps taken to revise the plan are contained in the appendices. This plan builds off the plan submitted in 2007. What is proposed is a long term, sustainable and multifaceted approach to addressing recent demographic trends and closing gaps in achievement among student subgroups. In addressing these issues the needs of the GPS Community and the values of the constituents in various neighborhoods need to be considered. In schools cited for racial imbalance there is a strong cultural bias that the school functions not only as a learning center, but also as a community center for the residents of the attendance area.

With consistent and effective implementation of the above strategies, the Greenwich Board of Education firmly believes it will move toward improved racial balance of our schools.

Sincerely,

Barbara O'Neill

Chair, Greenwich Board of Education

## Background and Context

The plan addresses three issues that the District is facing:

- **Racial Imbalance:** New Lebanon and Hamilton Ave schools have been cited by the State for racial imbalance.
- **Achievement Gap:** There is a significant and persistent disparity in academic performance among student sub groups.
- **Overcrowded/Underutilized Schools:** Greenwich has schools ranging in facility utilization from 69% to 108% with the variance projected to increase over the next ten years.

In January 2013, the Board of Education directed the Superintendent to develop a plan to address racial balance issues in the District. Presentations to the BOE provided historical background, existing conditions, a definition of the problem, opportunities for stakeholder input, exploration of possible options for addressing facility utilization and racial balance issues.

The GPS Mission, Vision of the Graduate and Strategic Vision for the Future create the context and articulate the outcomes for which the proposed solutions for racial imbalance were developed.

The **Mission of the Greenwich Public Schools** is:

- to educate all students to the highest levels of academic achievement;
- to enable them to reach and expand their potential; and
- to prepare them to become productive, responsible, ethical, creative and compassionate members of society.

### The Vision of the Graduate

The Greenwich Public Schools are committed to preparing students to function effectively in an interdependent global community. Therefore, in addition to acquiring a core body of knowledge, all students will develop their individual capacities to:

- Pose and pursue substantive questions
- Critically interpret, evaluate, and synthesize information
- Explore, define, and solve complex problems
- Communicate effectively for a given purpose
- Advocate for ideas, causes, and actions
- Generate innovative, creative ideas and products
- Collaborate with others to produce a unified work and/or heightened understanding

- Contribute to community through dialogue, service, and/or leadership
- Conduct themselves in an ethical and responsible manner
- Recognize and respect other cultural contexts and points of view
- Pursue their unique interests, passions and curiosities
- Respond to failures and successes with reflection and resilience
- Be responsible for their own mental and physical health

### **GPS Mission Alignment**

The GPS plan provides an opportunity to develop *magnet* designs that will align with and advance the mission of the GPS schools, the Vision of the Graduate, and our strategic vision for academic achievement in Greenwich. A priority will be coordinating the plan with our related initiatives in personalized and digital learning--so that GPS has a coherent, interactive system of school innovation.

### **Strategic Priorities for Greenwich Public Schools**

The overarching goal within the GPS is to transform teaching and learning for the needs of the 21st century. We have four critical areas of focus:

- Adoption of the Common Core and Next Generation Science Standards
- Transition to personalized instruction through digital learning strategies
- Evaluation by multiple measures of progress
- Innovation and R&D that bring best practices to scale

Our priorities will be addressed through approaches on the district level (digital learning and personalized learning initiatives) as well as within specific efforts in individual schools (magnet models, digital learning pilots and personalized learning initiatives).

## **Steps Taken to Revise the Plan**

The work of revising the Greenwich Racial Balance Plan was organized around six major tasks including:

- A. Board Review and Public Engagement
- B. Research: 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.
  - o Demographics, School Capacity and Enrollment Projections
  - o Market Research on Parent Choice
- C. Magnet Planning & Implementation
- D. Expansion of New Lebanon School
- E. Residency Verification
- F. Closing Gaps in Achievement among Student Subgroups
  - o Disaggregating CMT data by need, race/ethnicity and gender
  - o School Equity Study

### **A. Board Review and Public Engagement**

The public engagement process included hearings, forums, small group meetings, online feedback, taped airings of the Board meetings, hearings and forums (available online), and documents translated into Spanish and posted to the GPS web site. The summary of comments, questions and suggestions reflected below are derived from all of the public comment settings.

#### Public Hearings/Forums:

Since the May 23, 2013 Board of Education Meeting, seven public hearings or forums were held in order to provide the public with an opportunity to comment and ask questions. The forums were held primarily at the secondary schools in order to provide ample space, and to provide ease of access geographically.

#### Online Public Comment:

The Board/District has provided an opportunity for members of the public to submit comments online. To date, 120 entries have been received.

#### Small Group:

In addition to the Public Hearings and Forums, the administration met with small groups, including GPS Leadership, GPS teacher representatives, PTA Council, Elected Officials, Community Organizations, Greenwich Association of Realtors, and members of the press. There were at least 14 such meetings.

#### Additional Public Engagement Efforts:

All Board Meetings and all but one Public Forum on the topic of Facility Utilization & Racial Balance were taped and are available on GPS--TV (GPS Web Site).

Parentlink, eMail, Web Site & Press Notices and Reminders: The schedule of Board Meetings and Public Comment Opportunities and reminders was promoted via Parentlink (sent to approximately 86% of GPS families) and Friday Folders, eMail to Community Leaders (Elected Officials, PTA Council, etc.), GPS Staff, and media. The schedule also appeared on the GPS Web Calendar and in the section of the web site dedicated to this topic.

Documents on Web and copied – Access to the Board documents on Facility Utilization & Racial Balance were posted to the web site. Copies were made available at each of the hearings, forums and small group meetings.

Spanish Translations – Key documents were translated into Spanish and posted to the GPS Web Site. Copies of the translated documents were made available at the public forums. Three of the public forums offered Spanish translation services. The District also conducted a forum in Spanish with English translation.

## **B. Research**

### Demographics, School Capacity and Enrollment Projections – Facility Utilization and Racial Balance Study:

Milone & MacBroom, Inc. were hired based on a RFP to do an in depth analysis of Greenwich demographics to provide background information on which to base a discussion of racial balance and facility utilization. They analyzed demographic trends, housing stock enrollment forecasts by elementary attendance using federal, state, local and private sources of information. This information allowed the Board and community to consider the impact of various options for improving racial balance and efficiently utilizing facilities. Key findings are as follows:

- The current system of magnet schools and elementary attendance areas is insufficient to address overall facility utilization issues and racial imbalance at New Lebanon and Hamilton Avenue.
- Given the projected high utilization of the eleven elementary schools over the next 5 to 10 years, it is not advisable to close an elementary school.
- Redistricting to racially balance enrollment at Hamilton Avenue and New Lebanon would require moving 900 students to new schools (22% of total elementary enrollment), compromise neighborhood attendance areas, increase transportation costs and student time on buses, and be unlikely to work for more than two years given shifting demographic patterns.
- Addressing racial balance through voluntary choice would require major restructuring of the current partial magnet program, some redistricting and voluntary movement of a significant percentage of minority students out of Hamilton Avenue and New Lebanon.

### Market Research - Parent Choice Survey:

GPS hired Metis Associates to conduct research on elementary school choice through the administration of a survey to parents of all elementary school students in the district and six focus groups with a sample of GPS elementary school parents. The survey was developed collaboratively with GPS administration and was administered online and in paper format from August 20 through September 5, 2013. Focus groups were conducted on September 18, 23, and 24, 2013. Major findings from the parent survey and focus groups include:

- 73% of the parents of GPS elementary students prefer to keep their child in a neighborhood school, even if given the option of school choice.
- Parents said they prefer neighborhood schools because they help foster a strong sense of community and parental involvement.
- Some parents are frustrated that the district is considering school choice as a means to address both the facility utilization and racial balance issues, and they are skeptical that school choice is a viable solution to the issues.
- An overwhelming majority of the respondents, however, support voluntary choice over any form of forced redistricting.
- When asked to choose a preferred theme, respondents identified the IB model at ISD or STEM as their top choices.
- The feeder pattern from elementary to middle school is important to parents; about a third of survey respondents would consider a school outside of the neighborhood if it allowed their child to matriculate to the GPS middle school they prefer.
- Many respondents indicated that bus transportation to and from school is an absolute necessity for their family; however, many focus group respondents thought that the district should use resources for educational purposes rather than providing buses for children to attend non-neighborhood schools.

### **C. Magnet Planning and Implementation**

The magnet program worked successfully to address facility utilization issues in the eastern end of town (ISD) and racial balance issues at Julian Curtiss (aided by changing demographics within the attendance area).

The magnet program has been less successful at achieving racial balance at New Lebanon or Hamilton Avenue. When New Lebanon and Hamilton Avenue were reconstituted as magnet schools, enrollment was declining within their attendance areas, and there were a sufficient number of magnet seats to potentially achieve racial balance within the definition of the state statute.

A number of factors combined to limit the success of the Hamilton Avenue and New Lebanon magnets: 1) enrollment began to grow within the school attendance areas limiting the number of magnet seats and 2) minority enrollment growth within the HA and NL attendance areas was higher than the district average making it impossible to

achieve racial balance given the reduction in magnet seats. In addition, the magnet theme at Hamilton Avenue was designed around the needs of students in the local attendance area (reduced class size in K and Gr 1, Suzuki music program, prekindergarten) rather than to attract parents and students from outside of the attendance area. Finally, the lack of transportation for magnet students probably limited the viability of the magnet program for families who could not transport their children to and from school.

#### **D. New Lebanon Expansion**

As a result of the Milone and MacBroom study, the District administration sought funds to explore renovating and expanding New Lebanon School. Initial analysis found that adding two classrooms, as was considered this spring, would be insufficient to provide effective and equitable educational programming. It also would not accommodate the anticipated growth in enrollment on the western end of Greenwich. The renovation and expansion would help reduce growing enrollment pressures on Hamilton Avenue and Glenville Schools while allowing for more magnet students at New Lebanon School.

At the October 10, 2013 Board of Education Work Session, the Board of Education authorized \$25,000 from the current operating budget to perform a limited focus study on New Lebanon Elementary School. This Pre-Feasibility Study provides a “jump start” for the full Feasibility Study, which will be paid for by capital funds of \$100,000 (requested for FY 2014-2015). If capital funds are available, a Request for Proposals (RFP) will be released in the spring 2014 to begin July 1, 2014. The purpose of the study was to identify expansion options at New Lebanon Elementary School. In preparing the study, KSQ (District’s architect) met numerous times with the Superintendent, Managing Director of Operations, Director of Facilities, and New Lebanon School Principal. Key findings of the pre-feasibility study include:

- The benchmark analysis shows New Lebanon School is below average as compared to all District elementary schools in numerous site features, classroom inventory and all core common areas.
- Preliminary Planning & Zoning review suggests that there is sufficient floor area ratio to expand on present location. However, other site characteristics, such as steep slopes, place constraints on construction.
- The maximum square feet calculation, potential state reimbursement, and draft education specification is based on the current grade configuration (e.g. no PreK). Any modifications to grade configuration will adjust calculations, etc.
- Five options were reviewed. Only two options met the educational/program needs. One of these options requires swing space during construction.
- Both options would increase the number of seats available for magnet students to at least 25% of the total school enrollment.
- Independent cost analysis estimates construction costs between \$29.9M to \$34.7M. Estimates do not include architect/design fees. Cost estimates will change as design progresses.

- Construction schedule anticipates start date of July 2016 with 18-24 month construction window, depending on the option selected. Estimated completion date is January/June 2018.

The District administration proposes developing a plan to take advantage of the Connecticut Statutory provision for 80% reimbursement of building costs for “Diversity” schools. Any capital improvements at New Lebanon, as a racially imbalanced school, qualify for 80% reimbursement from the State. If a new building is pursued, this would require formal establishment of a Building Committee and adherence to all Town of Greenwich requirements for facility development and construction.

### **E. Residency Verification**

The BOE authorized the residency verification of all students in Kindergarten through 5th grade for the 2013-2014 school year by October 1, 2013. The purpose was to confirm that all enrolled elementary students were eligible to attend the Greenwich public schools and that the Board is using accurate data to make decisions regarding facility utilization and racial balance.

The Greenwich Public Schools’ standard process requires five documents to verify eligibility to register for school – photo ID, notarized affidavit of parent/guardianship, two utility bills, proof of homeowner (mortgage, property tax bill or deed) or lessee (current lease) . The Town’s Beach Pass application process only requires two proofs of residency,

This Kindergarten through fifth grade residency verification process began on July 1, 2013 and was completed by October 1, 2013. No families were found to be out of compliance with the District residency requirements.

### **F. Closing Gaps in Achievement among Student Subgroups**

#### District Data Study

The District created a profile of students performing below goal on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) as a first step in identifying the root causes of underperformance. For the purposes of this analysis, students were divided into subgroups by both demographic categories and need factors. Demographic categories include gender and race/ethnicity. Assuming that the ability to do well on standardized tests is evenly distributed across the population, differences based solely on demographic categories should have no impact on student performance. Need factors, on the other hand, are correlated through extensive research to student performance. Students who are not proficient in English or have a disability that is impacting their learning would be expected to perform at a lower level on standardized tests. The impact of family income on academic performance is, perhaps less well understood, but similarly well documented.

Given the differences in student performance by need factor, the nature of the impact of the need factor on learning is critical to our strategies for closing gaps in achievement. This analysis also includes an additional need factor comprised of students who exhibit two or more need factors. Students with no need factors allow us to do a controlled

comparison of the differences in performance among demographic categories. A limitation of this study is the potential existence of need factors including parent education level, age within the grade level cohort and differences in income above the poverty level. Preliminary findings include:

- 69% of the students performing below goal have one or more identified needs
- There are significant differences in the percentage of students performing below goal based on need factors. 93% of the students with two or more need factors performed below goal as compared to 9% of the students with no need factors.
- 40% of students enrolled in Title I schools perform below goal as compared to 14% in the Non-Title I schools. 48% of the total number of students performing below goal in the District are enrolled in the four Title I schools.
- The performance of students with need factors is roughly comparable between the Title I Schools and the Non-Title I schools with the exception of students qualifying for Special Education services (90% below goal in Title I schools to 59% below goal in the Non-Title I schools).
- 6% of the students with no need factors enrolled in Non-Title I schools perform below goal as compared to 19% of students with no need factors enrolled in Title I schools.
- Black and Hispanic students are more likely than Asian or White students to perform below goal. While the differences in performance by race/ethnicity are reduced when controlling for need factors, 27% of Black students and 14% of Hispanic students with no need factors perform below goal as compared with 8% of white students and 5% of Asian students.
- Males are more likely than females to score below goal (23% to 18%). This gap remains constant even when controlling for need (9% of males with no need factors to 7% of females with no need factors).

This analysis served as the basis for forming a committee to develop a comprehensive plan to close gaps in achievement and retaining the Connecticut Center for School Change to conduct an outside audit of the District's practices.

#### School Equity Study:

The Connecticut Center for School Change is a statewide, non-profit organization with a mission to help all districts teach all students to achieve at high standards. They support comprehensive K-12 educational reform through technical assistance, leadership development programs, conferences and seminars, research and application of best practices. CCSC was retained by the District to conduct an audit of current practice in the four Greenwich schools that receive Title I funding (Hamilton Avenue, Julian Curtiss, New Lebanon and Western Middle School).

Using an empirically validated framework developed by Anthony Bryk and his colleagues at the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, the

Connecticut Center for School Change conducted two day site visits at each of the four Title I schools. The purpose of these studies was to understand the impact of current efforts to close achievement gaps and to compare current efforts with known best practice strategies for gap closing. The recommendations presented by the Center to the Board of Education at the April 4<sup>th</sup> Board Meeting include:

- Create affordable, high-quality preschool to reduce the preparation gap
- Expand learning time beyond the normal school day and in summer to accelerate learning
- Increase intellectual rigor demanded of students within classrooms
- Strengthen data systems and data usage to track critical questions relative to accelerating learning
- Create comprehensive parent and community engagement strategies

The District is committed to developing, funding and implementing a multi-phase, multi-year plan that will address the root causes of underachievement, enhance student engagement, expand opportunities for academic learning and close gaps in achievement.