

GREENWICH PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Greenwich, Connecticut

Date of Meeting November 7, 2013

Title of Item: Discussion and Possible Action on Next Steps to Address Facility Utilization and Racial Balance

REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION OR PRESENTATION OF INFORMATION ITEMS

Action required

Informational only

Submitted By Ms. Leslie Moriarty

Position Board Chair

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

Yes

No

Synopsis of Proposal:

This agenda item is to identify the next steps for addressing facility utilization and racial balance. At its October 24, 2013 meeting, the Board of Education (BOE) voted to try to reach a mutually acceptable resolution with the State Department of Education (SDE). The BOE asked its representative to meet with the SDE to understand the process and expectations. The

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Recommended Action (if appropriate)

None

following information was shared at that meeting (summary document attached):

1. The SDE indicated Greenwich should submit a plan that will stabilize and begin to improve the racial balance in two of its schools.
2. The SDE indicated it will primarily evaluate the plan on its impact on the racial statistics since that is the basis of the Statute. SDE would want to see proposed actions that permit the SDE to reasonably project that the plan will stabilize the trends and possibly start improving them. The criteria in developing the plan should be the following: does it positively impact racial balance.
3. The SDE confirmed its interpretation of the Unique Schools section of the regulations as applying to only schools with no attendance zone. All other schools, even those designated as Unique Schools, would be included in the racial balance list and fall under the Commissioner's oversight. The Commissioner would request a plan, either formal or informal, addressing the racial balance statistics as a condition of continued status as a Unique School.

For its next steps, the Greenwich BOE needs to determine its response to the SDE. The BOE has already taken action to address issues that will improve the achievement and operations of our District. These actions are also expected to have a positive impact on racial balance. These actions are all based on the Board's support for neighborhood schools and parent choice. The BOE voted to do the following:

1. Conduct a feasibility study for the renovation and/or expansion of New Lebanon School. The issues to be studied include defining what are the needs for the school's facilities to support a 21st century learning environment that accommodates the programs and services needed for the forecast enrollment. As part of the study, consideration will be given to the impact of accommodating additional magnet students as well as the needs of the neighborhood students.
2. Evaluate alternate magnet themes at Hamilton Avenue School. The Board is interested in developing an identifiable unifying theme that supports academic achievement. This modification will allow a sharper focus on achievement of all students and have the potential of attracting additional magnet students.
3. Focus on the achievement gap with differentiated programming and services. The entire district will benefit if the performance of the underperforming students show greater than average growth. The efforts taken to address these needs to date, while showing some efficacy, have not yielded enough sustained progress. The Board wants to better support the staff and students by evaluating and implementing proven strategies. It would be expected that this programming would make three of the current magnet schools more attractive for new magnet families.
4. Add Western Middle School as an intradistrict partial magnet school offering the 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 or International School at Dundee. The ability to continue this program into the middle years may encourage more families to choose to be a magnet family at both the elementary and secondary levels.

5. Evaluate the current magnet selection process and rules to determine if they meet the District's current objectives. The evaluation is to include the identification of changes that would result in greater movement for racial balance and facility utilization.

From the outset, the BOE indicated it will make decisions that are in the best interest of our students and our District. The Board needs to determine two things: (a) will the combined impact of these actions be sufficient to meet the meet SDE criteria of stabilizing and improving the current racial imbalance, and (b) does the BOE believe it is in the District's interest to consider an additional action to encourage more movement. The Board can consider, at a minimum, options previously identified:

- Open seats at underutilized schools (one or more of the three schools that have 5 year projections of lower enrollment than capacity -- North Street School, Old Greenwich School, or Parkway School). This can be done as a school of choice (no theme) or a magnet school (theme). This would provide more choice, assist with facility utilization and impact racial balance. Issues surrounding transportation, lottery protocol, caps per grade, middle school designation, costs and other factors would need to be considered.
- Add preschool sections at an underutilized school to create movement with the idea that some of those children will stay in that school for their elementary years. This option assists the Board with its early literacy goals while also impacting racial balance. Issues surrounding transportation, lottery protocol, caps per grade, middle school designation, costs and other factors would need to be considered.
- Determine actions necessary for New Lebanon School and Hamilton Avenue School to more closely comply with the SDE working definition of a unique school.

Possible Next Steps

- From the outset, the BOE indicated it will make decisions that are in the best interest of our students and our District. The BOE will need to determine if it believes the actions taken to date are sufficient to meet the SDE's stated standard of stabilizing the racial trends and possibly improving them. If not, the BOE will need to determine what else is needed to develop a credible plan.
- If the BOE believes more is needed for a plan to meet the SDE's stated goal of stabilizing and possibly improving the trend, it can request the Superintendent identify and develop an additional element to be part of the actions already taken by the Board, which together would comprise a racial balance plan. Such recommendations should be developed with the involvement of parents and staff.

November 4, 2013

Summary of October 29th Meeting with representative of State Department of Education

- The purpose of the meeting was open dialogue with the State Department of Education (SDE) regarding process and SDE's expectations for Greenwich's response to racial imbalance notification.
- Key message from SDE was that Greenwich is being asked to provide a plan that shows actions that may credibly be expected, at a minimum, to stabilize and, hopefully, to improve the statistics.
- SDE is asking Greenwich to amend its 2007 plan to address the reasons or contributing factors that made it unsuccessful in improving or eliminating racial imbalance. SDE will primarily evaluate the plan on its impact on the racial statistics since that is the basis of the Statute. SDE would want to see proposed actions that permit the SDE to reasonably project that the plan will stabilize the trends and possibly start improving them. The criteria in developing the plan should be the following: does it positively impact racial balance.
- SDE confirmed its interpretation of Unique Schools portion of the regulations, which are:
 - A school is automatically designated a Unique School if it has no students designated to attend (i.e., no attendance zone). For those schools, SDE will keep statistics on racial composition but not include it on any list that cites imbalance.
 - All other schools, including those that have been designated as Unique Schools, would be placed on the imbalance list if it meets the definitions cited in the regulations and thus will fall under the Commissioner's oversight. In such situations, the Commissioner will want to see a plan to address racial balance, whether a formal plan in accordance with the regulations or a less formal plan, as a condition of continued status as a Unique School.
 - It was stated that the State BOE has no power to prescribe a particular solution; they can only reject a proposed plan and request a new plan be submitted.
- Based on the discussion, it seems that the path forward is for the Greenwich BOE to develop a revision to the 2007 plan that would permit it reasonably to predict that the plan will stabilize and possibly improve racial balance. Once developed, the plan should be submitted to the SDE/SBOE for approval. No timeline was discussed, but there is some expectation for continued progress by the Greenwich BOE.

TBM

11/3/2013