

DRAFT

Community Schools, a Practical and Pragmatic Plan for
Student Achievement, Facility Overcrowding, and Racial
Diversity
at
New Lebanon and Hamilton Avenue Elementary Schools

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The Greenwich BoE can take practical and pragmatic steps to address persistent achievement gap and other challenges using current resources and reflecting community values and desires

Facts

- Many students at Hamilton Avenue and New Lebanon Schools are continuously underperforming peers in other Greenwich elementary schools. This “achievement gap” has persisted for many years
- 8 of 11 elementary schools are running at or near capacity measured by number of required classrooms to service children within current attendance areas
- Connecticut has laws requiring school districts to remedy racial isolation in schools and supporting regulations requiring adherence to strict racial quota targets in individual schools.
- CT State Board of Education has demanded remedy for “racial imbalance” (variance to student body racial composition targets) at Hamilton Avenue and New Lebanon schools

Recommendations

- Implement pragmatic plan that addresses student achievement, overcrowding, and racial isolation with minimal disruption to other schools in the Greenwich Public School system
- Communicate to CSDE that Greenwich is currently and will remain in compliance with racial balance statutes and regulations by maintaining magnet school programs at Hamilton Avenue and New Lebanon Schools
- Implement comprehensive package of initiatives at HA and NL, based in proven best practice to close the “achievement gap” for underperforming student groups particularly Hispanic and free & reduced lunch eligible cohorts
- Execute “supporting actions” including funding and accelerating digital learning to supercharge closing the achievement gap along with other initiatives

Our plan is based on priorities and principles reflective of Greenwich community v. policy priorities and views from Hartford

1. Student Achievement
2. Facilities Utilization
3. Racial Balance

The Board of Education has said student achievement is the top priority in any racial balance plan. But, most planning to date has prioritized compliance with CT State Racial Balance Regulations and improving facility usage.

Any plan should be based in principles embraced by Greenwich community:

- Neighborhood schools evolving into Community schools
- Parental decision-making and choice
- Local control
- Public-private partnerships
- Proven best practices
- Educating each student to their individual potential
- Equity and equality
- Deep parental involvement in schools
- Efficient use of resources

Need to preserve educational opportunity equity and not create systems of “haves – have not” school programming

Greenwich should apply proven best practice examples to improve achievement in schools with majority free & reduced lunch populations

- Contrasting high performing and low performing schools with poverty, many states (Illinois, Texas, Wisconsin, California) are implementing effective comprehensive programs to successfully address achievement gaps
- Integrated program of leadership, personnel, school characteristics, curriculum and instruction, and community factors required. Can not cherry pick elements.
- Extensive parental involvement that is culturally aware including opportunities to improve literacy and parenting skills is one of the highest leveraged strategies to improve achievement.

Best Practice we have:

- ✓ Strong School Leadership
- ✓ Standards Based Curriculum
- ✓ Good Teachers
- ✓ High Quality Professional Development
- ✓ Use of data to drive decisions
- ✓ Internal Capacity for Accountability

Best Practice we need to add:

- Emphasis on Early Literacy
- More Academic Learning Time
- Technology to Enhance Learning
- Increased Parental Involvement
“Involve the community in schooling”
- Early Childhood Education Programs
- Mandatory Summer School

* Derived from “Golden Spike” High Poverty High Performing Schools , NCREL and other studies

...there are further best practice examples to improve achievement in schools with majority Hispanic populations

- Southern California has one of the highest concentrations of schools with majority Latino populations and provides successful exemplar in closing the achievement gap.
- Educational experts in Hispanic public education settings endorsed integrated program with critical unified themes:
 - Critical Role and responsibility of education leaders and institutions
 - Adjusting teacher expectations of students
 - Relevant, culturally engaging curricular design and offerings
 - Improved Student achievement through empowered students
 - Increased parent involvement and adult education
 - Accessibility to academic assistance and tutoring programs
 - Community engagement and resource usage
- Three recommended practices are critical for success:
 - **“Community engagement and community serve as the hub for improved academic achievement for schools and students” – Make the school the focus of the community**
 - Coordinate and use pedagogy and interventions to address students struggling in both math and language.
 - Implement parent educational programs to support parents with limited educational experience

* Derived from “Addressing the Achievement Gap” California State University, Fullerton (Orange County)

Strong indicators that Greenwich is already in compliance with Connecticut's racial balance statutes and regulations

- **Greenwich is already in compliance with State mandates.** Because Hamilton Avenue, Dundee, Julian Curtis, and New Lebanon are magnet schools, they are designated as “unique schools” under state education regulations and exempt from the strict racial target system. Therefore, the Greenwich BoE need not take any further action beyond regular reporting of student body demographics
- **BoE should vote to reaffirm it's intent to comply** with current CT racial balance statutes and regulations, reaffirm Hamilton Avenue and New Lebanon Schools are magnet schools, and indicate BoE will continue to report student body demographics consistent with CSBE regulations for designated “Unique Schools”
- **BoE should reply to the Connecticut State Board of Education demand for a new racial balance plan that Greenwich Public Schools comply with and will continue to comply with current statutes and regulations on racial balance**
- BoE should initiate collaboration with parent and volunteer groups with standing who are examining CT state statutes with an eye to identifying ways to preserve our Neighborhood / Community schools
- BoE should establish a clear position on participating or leading constitutional challenge to existing CT Racial Balance statutes as a last resort

Implement integrated program of initiatives at Hamilton Avenue and New Lebanon Schools, based in proven best practice to close the “achievement gap” for underperforming student groups

1. Recast or strengthen the magnet school programs at Hamilton Avenue and New Lebanon Schools

- Hamilton Avenue has not had a meaningful magnet program since 2010
- Magnet program should be refocused on academic themes with intense rigor. Potential options could include English immersion, Science Technology Engineering Math (STEM), or Core Knowledge.
- Assign “tiger-team” of Central Office administrators to strengthen and support stronger implementation of BoE best practices including Leadership Development, Teacher assessment and professional development, and data driven student analysis and decision making.

2. Tailor programs content and delivery methods, both academic and social/emotional, to the needs of Hamilton Avenue and New Lebanon school communities

- Community school parents should help determine which programs are best able to address the needs of kids and parents, including adult education, Pre-K and extended school day
- Any additional programming should be academically focused including tutoring, homework assistance, and total immersion English instruction
- Programming should be coordinated with other public agencies and charitable organizations to support the whole child

Implement integrated program of initiatives at Hamilton Avenue and New Lebanon Schools, based in proven best practice to close the “achievement gap” for underperforming student groups

3. Aggressively cultivate and encourage productive partnership and affiliations with community organizations that can support community schools

- We should learn from the successful example of the New Lebanon – Bryam nexus that includes the Byram Archibald Neighborhood Center, Byram Shubert Library, St. Paul Church and others.
- Programing must consider equity of opportunity across GPS system and should leverage public-private partnerships

4. Redirect existing Adult Education Program to engage parents more deeply in their child’s academic success

- Support at home supercharges learning in the classroom, if we’re serious about success we need to engage the whole family. ADP could offer evening instruction to parents in neighborhood schools in English literacy, basic math, business courses, similar to those already offered to students at Greenwich High School

We need to implement supporting initiatives to achieve a comprehensive plan to succeed

5. Accelerate Digital Learning Initiatives and obtain “surge” investment in temporary staff to support central office and school-level DL team

- Technology enabled learning enables skill development and remediation based on individual student needs

6. Implement “fair and equal” Residency Verification System

- BoE must continue build community confidence in our stewardship of town resources, while balancing commitment to provide education services to all Greenwich residents
- Annual verification for all students assures fair and equal system

7. Collaborate with Housing Authority of Town of Greenwich and Town of Greenwich Zoning Compliance to assure safe living conditions for children

- Without compromising student or parental privacy, BoE should explore collaboration with other Town departments responsible for safe living conditions of resident children

8. Develop new school capacity forecasting system

- BoE needs reliable forecasts to appropriately plan facilities and budgets. The current forecast and planning models must be updated to provide more reliable information to the BoE

9. Allow cross district registration for International Baccalaureate program at Western Middle School

- International School at Dundee students primarily attend overcrowded Eastern Middle School for Grade 6 through 8. Many parents have expressed interest in continuing with IB Middle Years program. BoE should designate WMS as a District-wide Magnet School and allow parents to enroll students from any Elementary school

Greenwich is a community enriched by diversity and must make efforts to address any real or perceived racial isolation in schools

BoE must canvass to determine if there any students who feel racially isolated in their current neighborhood school

- Fundamentally, we believe in parental choice to enable families to place children in schools where they can succeed and thrive
- Optionally, BoE should consider expansion of a choice program to enable any elementary school student in an underperforming or crowded school, or who may feel racially isolated, to attend another school within Greenwich, with transportation provided.
- BoE should run a pilot trial between one largely minority school and a high performing majority white school with classroom capacity (?)

Elementary School Capacity

Greenwich will need all available elementary schools open to meet current and projected student population

- Overcrowding is most prevalent in schools in eastern zone of Greenwich
- Pre-K programs should be placed where capacity exists rather to minimize extensive capital building investments.
- **Parkway School is required to be open to service District's current and projected Pre-K through Grade 5 student enrollment (per John Curtin)**

Classrooms Required for Kindergarten through Grade 5 Enrollment											
	Eastern Zone				Central Zone			Western Zone			
	ISD	NM	RV	OG	CC	JC	NS	PK	GL	HA	NL
Standard Rooms	20	28	28	31	29	22	31	25	27	29	17
Special Rooms	2	5	4	6	6	4	6	6	5	5	3
Capacity	18	23	24	25	23	18	25	19	22	24	14
Enrolled 2013/14	18	23	24	20	22	18	19	12	22	20	14
Available Capacity	--	--	--	5	1	--	6	7	--	4	--

Immediate Next Steps for BoE

- Notify State BoE that Greenwich complies with existing state law to which exempt HA and NL schools from racial target system
- Form neighborhood advisory group to identify major educational needs in each community (e.g. extended school day, culturally relevant programming, afters program, Adult education)
- Complete the residency verification canvass
- Refine attendance and capacity projections based on observed 2013-14 data
- Revise implementation to accelerate Digital Learning rollout and request interim funding for other elementary schools
- Reassess and reprioritize capital plan with special attention to short-term and long-term plan at New Lebanon School

Summary

Community Schools is a practical and pragmatic plan reflecting desires and values of Greenwich parents, residents and taxpayers

- Protect and enhance neighborhood schools
- Orient neighborhood schools to serve particular needs of their community – student and adult
- Focus on academic achievement
- Transformation based on proven best practice rather than local experimentation
- Simplicity and consistency rather than complexity and differences
- Provide choice to those students who feel racially isolated

Most Important:

- Educational equity as to outcomes
- No redistricting

Appendix--Legal Options

- On August 27, 2013, Greenwich public school parent and attorney, Ben Bianco, sent a letter to the Connecticut Department of Education asserting that both Hamilton Avenue and New Lebanon are Greenwich-designated intradistrict magnet schools and are, therefore, “unique schools” under Reg. 10-226e-1(10). Unique schools, as per Reg. 10-226e-9, are NOT subject to racial balancing requirements.
 - The State DoE has not responded to Mr. Bianco’s letter.
- As mentioned at the Greenwich BoE meeting on August 29, 2013—and elsewhere—the State has apparently stated, off the record, that to achieve “unique school” status an intradistrict magnet must be a “full magnet.” The term *full magnet*, of course, appears nowhere in any State or Federal statute.
- Regardless, it is obvious that even the State does not believe it has the legal authority to enforce racial balancing on Hamilton Avenue and New Lebanon. In numerous e-mail correspondence and phone conversations with Greenwich public school parents over the last few weeks, Kenneth Imperato (Coordinator of Choice Programs for the State DoE), Regina Hopkins (Manager of Magnet Schools for the State DoE), and Laura Anastasio (attorney for the DoE) have made the following statements:
 - “[I]t is at the discretion of the Greenwich Public Schools as to whether or not the program design distinguishes the school as an intra-district magnet school.” (Imperato)
 - “Intradistrict magnets are subject to the rules established by the district’s governance structure” (Hopkins).
 - An intradistrict magnet school is defined by the local district, not the State. (Hopkins)
 - The State has no laws or regulations defining the term intradistrict magnet school. (Anastasio)
 - The State BoE has no written definition of the term intradistrict magnet school. (Anastasio)

Sources Consulted

- The Achievement Gap, Harvard University - March, 2013
- Greenwich Public Schools Consultative Services for Digital Learning Findings and Recommendations February, 2013
- Addressing the Achievement Gap California State University at Fullerton - October, 2009
- CREATING "NO EXCUSES" (TRADITIONAL) PUBLIC SCHOOLS: EVIDENCE FROM HOUSTON / w17494, NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH 1050 Massachusetts Avenue Cambridge, MA 02138 - October 2011
- CLOSING ILLINOIS' ACHIEVEMENT GAP: LESSONS FROM THE "GOLDEN SPIKE" HIGH POVERTY HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOLS, Northern Illinois University Center for Governmental Studies - June, 2002
- North Central Regional Education Laboratory (NCREL) recently completed a study of high performing high poverty schools in **Wisconsin** (NCREL, 2000).