



FAIRFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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Charlene Russell-Tucker
Commissioner of Education
Connecticut State Department of Education
450 Columbus Blvd
Hartford, CT 06103

Dear Commissioner Russell-Tucker,

I write on behalf of the Fairfield Board of Education to provide an update on the proposed plan to address racial imbalance within Fairfield Public Schools, which was approved by the Connecticut State Board of Education on November 2, 2022. Over the past 15 months, our district has diligently deliberated on how to tackle the identified racial imbalance issue at McKinley Elementary School. We have thoroughly explored various options outlined in the plan, placing significant emphasis on crafting a redistricting strategy in collaboration with the SLAM group. However, we have been unable to identify a viable solution for the following reasons:

- We have concluded that redistricting would be ineffective. The McKinley parent community is committed to the school they love and given that many families in the attendance zone are renters, we predict that they would simply move into any revised attendance zone. Moreover, redistricting would disrupt large numbers of students and their families, having a negative impact on their academic performance and overall well-being.
- Our schools are facing utilization issues due to enrollment, specialized program needs and expansion of pre-school offerings. Redistributing students without adequate facilities to accommodate them will result in suboptimal learning conditions especially for the student being displaced from McKinley School.
- Redistricting would place further strain on transportation. Fairfield, like many districts across Connecticut, is facing challenges with their transportation provider in hiring enough drivers to fulfill the needs of the district. All our redistricting scenarios would cause a net increase in the number of students requiring transportation to and from school.

- Finally, while exploring potential solutions, we considered the implementation of an Intra-district magnet program. However, that approach was not workable because space constraints would require a significant number of families to be moved out of the school to make room for potential students from other attendance zones, causing problems similar to redistricting as described above.

Given these results of the lengthy deliberations over different options, on October 24, 2023, the Fairfield Board of Education adopted a resolution (attached), which includes the following:

2. The Board of Education has determined that, based on the factors listed above, there are no viable options for redistricting that may be implemented for the 2024-2025 school year without a significant and adverse impact on Fairfield Public School students, especially on students at McKinley Elementary School.

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4. The Board of Education and Superintendent will continue our work on behalf of the Fairfield school community to identify and address our short- and long-term facility and special programming needs, school climate initiatives, and work to update and/or amend our Racial Balance Plan to submit to the State Department of Education and State Board of Education when conditions permit.

5. In the interim, the Board of Education will continue to work collaboratively with our Superintendent and his Administration, community stakeholders, and town bodies. The Board of Education also stands ready to work directly with representatives of the State Board of Education to consider suggestions such representatives of the State Board of Education may have for a plan in the future that will benefit, not burden, our students.

We look forward to describing our ongoing efforts when we meet with you and the State Board of Education on March 6, 2024. We hope at that time to discuss whether and how the State Board of Education may appoint an expert to review our efforts and determine whether that expert may recommend a way to bring McKinley Elementary into compliance more quickly than we have determined possible.

In the meantime, the Fairfield Public Schools has taken significant steps to enhance our educational offerings at McKinley and throughout the district:

- We have developed and implemented a new ELA curriculum for PreK-12, aligning with approved programs mandated by the Right to Read legislation. Additionally, we have engaged a consultant to assess and enhance our Multilingual Learner program to better support students in language acquisition.
- We have partnered with the Partners for Educational Leadership for extensive professional development, focusing on high-quality instruction and equitable access for all students. Equity-focused training sessions, facilitated by Partners for Educational Leadership and Dr. Edward Fergus of Rutgers University, were provided to Board of Education members in the spring of 2023 and the winter of 2024.

- We have introduced a district-wide Social Emotional Learning platform, *Move this World*, to address the overall climate and culture in all our schools. All students receive explicit instruction on how to successfully set, pursue, and achieve lifelong goals. Our focus on SEL provides a healthy environment for all students in which to learn interpersonal skills and how to positively relate to one another.
- We have appointed a district Data and Assessment Coordinator, who, in close collaboration with teachers and administrators, has provided focused data analysis down to the level of each individual student. This work has initiated crucial dialogues concerning student achievement district-wide, with a specific focus on disparities among various student cohorts.
- FPS has welcomed a new principal at McKinley with extensive experience as both a teacher and administrator in urban school settings.

The members of the Fairfield Board of Education and I appreciate your attention to this matter and your commitment to providing the best possible education for our students. We look forward to working together with you to find an effective and equitable solution that considers the well-being and future of our children.

Sincerely,



Michael J. Testani
Superintendent

Attachment

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