



Amendment to Racial Imbalance Plan

Fairfield Public Schools

Approved by the Board of Education
November 15, 2016

I. Background

In May of 2015, the Connecticut State Board of Education (CSBE) notified the Fairfield Public Schools that McKinley School continued to be racially imbalanced. During the 2015-2016 school year, the Fairfield Board of Education (Board) studied the possibility of redistricting the student population to remedy this issue. The district engaged the consulting firm of Milone & MacBroom to study demographic patterns within the district and to recommend possible courses of action to reduce racial imbalance among the district's elementary schools. Milone & MacBroom presented its finding to the Fairfield Board of Education on February 16, 2016. The consultants concluded that, even with redistricting, no substantial improvement to the racial imbalance problem could occur until the renovations and additions to the Holland Hill and Mill Hill schools are complete. Specifically, the consultants stated that:

1. Racial Imbalance at McKinley and overcrowding at Holland Hill, Mill Hill and Sherman cannot be solved without school construction projects.
2. Pocket redistricting can mitigate racial imbalances at McKinley after the Holland Hill Construction Project is completed. However, it would result in Holland Hill becoming impending imbalanced (between 15% and 18% higher than district).
3. Following the completion of the Holland Hill and Mill Hill Construction Projects, the district can achieve racial imbalance objectives at McKinley.

On May 4, 2016, the Superintendent of Schools and Chairman of the Fairfield Board of Education presented this information to the State Board of Education. The CSBE, while pleased with the Board’s efforts to address the matter, requested that the Board present an amendment to its racial imbalance plan at its December 7, 2016 meeting.

II. History of Racial Imbalance at McKinley

The CSBE has set a standard by which to judge whether or not a school district is in compliance with the statute. All schools must be within 25 percentage points of the district average of minority students at the same grade span. Chart 1 summarizes McKinley’s data for the past six years.

*Chart 1:
History of Racial Imbalance at McKinley*

Year	McKinley % Minority	District % Minority	Absolute Imbalance
2010-11	43.47%	17.58%	25.89%
2011-12	45.70%	18.89%	26.81%
2012-13	43.41%	19.00%	24.41%
2013-14	45.85%	19.37%	26.48%
2014-15	49.10%	20.53%	28.57%
2015-16	47.90%	20.70%	27.20%

This chart indicates that McKinley School has exceeded the 25% standard in all but one of the last six years. Therefore, the Board is required to propose revisions to the district’s current Racial Imbalance Plan that will move McKinley School under the 25 percentage point differential.

III. Current Arrangements

The following are the features of the current Plan, as approved by the CSBE in October of 2007 and amended in September of 2010:

1) Opt In to McKinley:

Students from other elementary schools in Fairfield may “opt in” to attend McKinley School. Once the opt-in students complete their elementary years, they attend middle and high school based on the feeder patterns that pertain to their place of residence. Currently, 24 students from elsewhere in Fairfield attend school at McKinley under this arrangement. However, thirteen of these students are minority children. Although the Opt In program has not contributed to greater racial balance among our elementary schools, participation in the program signals the interest of these families in taking advantage of the quality instruction and the cultural diversity available at the McKinley School.

2) Opt Out from McKinley:

For a few years, students who resided in the McKinley attendance zone were offered the choice of “opting out” to other Fairfield elementary schools. However, the “opt out” arrangement did not have a positive impact on racial balance and was therefore terminated following the 2012-13 academic year.

3) Pre-School Options:

Students who reside in the McKinley attendance area have the option of attending pre-school at either the Burr or Dwight elementary schools. These students have the option of continuing at either Burr or Dwight for their K-5 education. Once the pre-school children reach kindergarten, their siblings are able to enroll at Burr or Dwight as well. Once they complete their elementary years, these students attend middle and high school according to the feeder patterns that pertain to their place of residence. Enrollment in the pre-school programs are as follows in 2016-17:

Chart 2:
Pre-kindergarten Programs, 2016-17

<u>Pre-Kindergarten Program</u>	<u>Capacity</u>	<u>Enrollment</u>	<u>McKinley Minority Enrollment</u>
Burr (AM and PM)	36	30	6
Dwight (AM and PM)	36	24	1
Totals	72	54	7

- a. Tuition of \$3,500 is charged to pre-kindergarten students. However, families unable to afford the tuition have the tuition either waived or reduced to 50 percent, depending on income.
- b. Transportation is provided for families in the pre-kindergarten programs only if they qualify for the tuition waiver or the tuition reduction. Families paying full tuition must provide their own transportation for the pre-kindergartens.

As a result of the Pre-kindergarten program, 17 minority students who would otherwise have attended McKinley School are currently enrolled in grades K-5 at either Dwight School or Burr School. This includes the siblings of former McKinley preschoolers who attend Dwight or Burr as the result of the program.

4) Open Choice:

Seventy-two students who reside in Bridgeport attend the Fairfield Public Schools under the Open Choice Program, under arrangements for Cooperative Education Services (CES). Of these, 51 are minority students enrolled in grades K through 5.

IV. Amendments

1) Pre-Kindergarten:

The district intends to modify the pre-kindergarten aspect of the Board's existing plan, as follows:

- a. While the pre-kindergarten programs have helped to address the racial imbalance issue, the Burr program has been the main contributor. Enrollment in the Dwight pre-kindergarten has been consistently lower than that at Burr. In addition, families electing the Dwight pre-kindergarten, and remaining there, are generally not having a positive impact on the racial imbalance issue. Thus the district will eliminate the Dwight pre-kindergarten program at the conclusion of the 2016-17 school year and instead offer a new location at Stratfield School. We believe that, with space available at nearby Stratfield School, we can attract more McKinley families to attend pre-kindergarten and remain at Stratfield.
- b. In an effort to further enhance the impact of the pre-K program on racial balance, McKinley students will be given priority in the enrollment process.
- c. The district will open a third pre-kindergarten at either Stratfield or Burr for the 2018-19 school year, if demand is demonstrated and space is available. This would raise the capacity of the pre-kindergarten programs to 108 slots.
- d. Pre-kindergarten tuition has not been increased from the \$3,500 level for the past five years. Based on a market survey of comparable programs, we recommend raising the tuition to \$4,250 per year, with an annual increase of 3 percent each year thereafter. Tuition waivers would remain in place.

Chart 4:
Pre-kindergarten Programs, 2017-2018 through 2018-2019

<i>Proposed 2017-18</i>		
<u>Pre-K Program</u>	<u>Capacity</u>	<u>Projected McKinley Minority Enrollment</u>
Burr (AM and PM)	36	6
Stratfield (AM and PM)	<u>36</u>	<u>8</u>
Totals:	72	14

<i>Proposed 2018-19</i>		
<u>Pre-K Program</u>	<u>Capacity</u>	<u>Projected McKinley Minority Enrollment</u>
Burr (AM and PM)	36	6
Stratfield (AM and PM)	36	8
Site TBD* (AM and PM)	<u>36</u>	<u>7</u>
Totals:	108	21

**Based on demand, with site subject to the approval of the Board of Education. Could be added to Burr or Stratfield.*

2) Open Choice:

In an effort to increase the percentage of minority students in the elementary schools other than McKinley, we will increase the total number of Open Choice students enrolled in the Fairfield Public Schools from the current level of 72 to a total of 100 by the start of the 2018-2019 school year. This will be accomplished by adding 18 Open Choice students to the elementary grades in the fall of 2017, with an emphasis on kindergarten and grade 1. An additional 18 students will be added to the elementary grades in the fall of 2018. Assuming attrition of four Open Choice students each year, this would mean a net increase of 14 students per year, bringing the district's total Open Choice enrollment to 100 by 2018-19.

We project that 60 out of the district's 86 Open Choice students would be enrolled in the elementary grades in 2017-18, and 73 out of 100 in 2018-19. Because virtually all Open Choice students are minority students, the expansion of the Open Choice program would raise the overall minority student population at the elementary level by approximately 1/2 percent by 2018-19, thus reducing the difference between the proportion of minority students in the district and the proportion at McKinley School.

3) Projected Impact of Proposed Changes:

The district projects that the steps outlined above would have the following impact on racial balance among the district's elementary schools:

Pre-School Option:

We estimate that the number of K-5 McKinley minority students attending other schools as a result of the expanded pre-school option will increase by 25, from the current 17 to 42 (including former Pre-K students as well as siblings) by 2019-20. All else being equal, this would reduce McKinley's minority student population by about 3% below what it would otherwise be, and increase the minority proportion of the district's remaining elementary schools slightly.

Expanded Open Choice:

Increasing the number of K-5 Open Choice students from the current 51 to 73 is expected to increase the percentage of minority students in the district's elementary schools by approximately 1/2 percentage point over what it would have been by 2018-19.

V. Additional Steps

If the previous five years are a guide, we can expect the proportion of minority students at McKinley to increase at a higher rate than the proportion of minority students at the district's other ten elementary schools. Therefore, additional action will be required to address the issue of racial imbalance among our elementary schools over the long term. The following steps will be considered in that regard:

1. Magnet Program at McKinley School

Creation of a “magnet” program at McKinley School that would attract students from elsewhere in the district and thereby reduce the percentage of minority students at the school. Based on the building’s current capacity, a magnet program could accommodate approximately fifty additional students without new construction. We estimate that a magnet program at McKinley would reduce the school’s minority population by two to three percentage points.

2. Redistricting

A \$15 million renovation and expansion project is scheduled at the Holland Hill School, with completion expected by the fall of 2018. Also, a \$15 million renovation and expansion project is proposed the Mill Hill School between 2018 and 2020. These projects will expand capacity at these schools by approximately 120 students. At that point, according to the Milone & MacBroom consultants, we will be able to revise school attendance areas to balance enrollments and to reduce significantly the extent of the minority student disparity between the McKinley School and our other elementary schools.