

Connecticut State Board of Education  
Hartford

To: State Board of Education  
From: Charlene Russell-Tucker, Commissioner of Education  
Date: May 4, 2022  
Subject: Fairfield Racial Imbalance Plan Update

### Executive Summary

McKinley Elementary School [“McKinley”], which is within the educational jurisdiction of the Fairfield Board of Education [“Fairfield Board”], was formally identified as racially imbalanced in April 2007. As a result of this determination, the Fairfield Board was required to submit to the Connecticut State Board of Education [“SBE”] a plan to correct the imbalance. The Fairfield Board did so, and in the subsequent fifteen years, as the racial imbalance at McKinley has persisted, the Fairfield Board has been directed to, and has, amended its plan on multiple occasions, most recently in 2017.

In the 2017 amendment, the Fairfield Board proposed creating a magnet program at McKinley that it hoped would attract students from other attendance zones in the district, thereby resulting in a reduction of the school’s minority population by approximately two to three percentage points. The Fairfield Board also proposed redistricting, which was contingent upon completing its building-expansion projects at Mill Hill School and Holland Hill School to increase capacity. The Fairfield Board believed that redistricting would enable it to revise school attendance areas to balance enrollments and thus reduce the imbalance between McKinley and the other elementary schools. Based upon these projections, the SBE conditionally approved the Fairfield Board’s amended plan on September 6, 2017, but it required the Fairfield Board to provide updates on its progress in implementing the plan. The last update that was provided to the full SBE was at the latter’s November 6, 2019, meeting, although the Fairfield Board has subsequently met with the Legislation and Policy Development Committee [“LPDC”], most recently at the LPDC’s November 3, 2021, meeting. As of this date, McKinley remains racially imbalanced.

### Background

#### Connecticut Racial Imbalance Laws

Connecticut law requires every school district having a school that is identified as racially imbalanced to submit a plan to the SBE for its approval to correct such imbalance. Pursuant to the regulations adopted by the SBE, racial imbalance exists when there is a disparity of at least 25 percent between the proportion of minority students for any school within a district and the

districtwide proportion in the equivalent-grade schools within the district. The SBE's role is to identify districts with racial imbalance issues, ensure that any such district develops a legally sound and effective plan to correct the racial imbalance and, as appropriate, provide technical assistance to such district. The racial imbalance laws give districts flexibility in how they address racial imbalance, provided that their plans are approved by the SBE.

### McKinley and Racial Imbalance

As noted, McKinley was identified as racially imbalanced in April 2007. In 2006, the disparity between the proportion of minority students at McKinley and the proportion of minority elementary-school students in the rest of the district was 28.74 percent. Following the submission of its original plan in 2007, the Fairfield Board was directed to amend the plan on several occasions.

The various iterations of the Fairfield Board's plans proposed various approaches to remediating the racial imbalance at McKinley. Nonetheless, every year since 2006 – except for 2012, when that figure fell to 24.41 percent -- McKinley has been racially imbalanced, the percentages having ranged in those years from a low of 25.45 percent in 2008 to a high of 30.02 percent in 2016. The most current percentage, for 2021, is 29.36 percent.

As noted, the Fairfield Board last met with the full SBE at its November 6, 2019, meeting. It met most recently with the LPDC on November 3, 2021, at which time the LPDC requested that the Fairfield Board return for a follow-up meeting on May 4, 2022. It further asked that in preparation for that meeting, the Fairfield Board submit by the end of January 2022 “an implementation plan with timeline.” On January 20, 2022, the Superintendent of the Fairfield Public Schools drafted a memorandum entitled “Addressing Racial Imbalance in the Fairfield Public Schools, a copy of which is enclosed. That memorandum included a proposed timeline that set forth the Fairfield Board's “projected actions steps and dates to address the racial imbalance concerns at McKinley Elementary School.” This timeline culminates on June 30, 2023, on which date the Fairfield Board proposes that it will adopt a “final facilities and usage plan that addresses racial imbalance needs.”

The LPDC is concerned that this timeline proposes an additional eighteen months from the date of the January 2022 memorandum before the Fairfield Board adopts an updated “plan that addresses racial imbalance needs.” The June 30, 2023, date identified in the Fairfield Board's memorandum would also be over sixteen years since McKinley was first identified as racially imbalanced. This concern is compounded by the fact that, as noted, the most recent, 2021 disparity between McKinley's proportion of minority students and the proportion of minority students in Fairfield's other elementary schools is 29.36 percent. This is an increase over McKinley's initial, 2006 percentage of 28.74 percent, and represents one of the highest racial imbalance figures for McKinley over the past fifteen years. Consequently, at its April 6, 2022, meeting, the LPDC voted to recommend that the Fairfield Board meet and discuss with the full SBE on May 4, 2022.

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Michael Cummings  
Superintendent of Schools

## Superintendent Memorandum

**To:** Board of Education  
**From:** Michael Cummings  
**Date:** January 20, 2022  
**Re:** Addressing Racial Imbalance in the Fairfield Public Schools

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On November 3, 2021, Ms. Vitale, Mr. Aysseh, Dr. Parrish, and myself, met with the Legislative Policy and Development Committee (LPDC) of the State Board of Education. We were invited to provide an update on the district's Racial Imbalance Plan.

On November 4, I received an email from Attorney Laura Anastasio of the State of Connecticut Department of Education. Attorney Anastasio relayed a request from the LPDC for Fairfield Public Schools to return in May to present an update on our plan. In addition, they requested an implementation plan with timeline to be shared with them by the end of January.

The timeline below includes our projected action steps and dates to address the racial imbalance concerns at McKinley Elementary School. The Board of Education's role in leading this work is an essential element of this plan and critical to its success.

The timeline is on the agenda of the January 27 Regular Meeting of the Board.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Task</b>
January 12, 2022	Request revised 10-year enrollment projections
January 12, 2022	Townwide Capital Planning Workshop. Meeting will include review of current Board of Education 5-year capital improvements
January 27, 2022	Board of Education meeting - presentation of Racial Imbalance timeline
January 28, 2022	Include discussion of racial imbalance plan in annual meeting with state legislators delegation
By February 14, 2022	Meet with Central Office administrators to discuss optional programming ideas for McKinley Elementary School
By February 28, 2022	Invite State Board of Education to tour McKinley Elementary School in May, 2022
By February 28, 2022	Board of Education Special Meeting to discuss 1) long term facilities usage and efficiencies including redistricting and programming needs, 2) by law changes to establish a facilities subcommittee of the Board

<b><i>Date</i></b>	<b><i>Task</i></b>
By April 29, 2022	BOE meets with Town Planning and Zoning to discuss impact of decisions on racial imbalance concerns
May 15, 2022	Develop the charge, timeline, and action plan for the committee
By May 31, 2022	State BOE tours McKinley Elementary School
May 31, 2022	Committee tours all elementary school buildings
June 30, 2022	Committee reviews all available documentation on enrollment, racial imbalance and facility concerns
September - November, 2022	Conduct town hall meetings and online surveys to both educate stakeholders on the needs of the district and solicit their input on planning needs of the district
December, 2022-February, 2023	Information and data gathered by the ad hoc committee is reviewed and collated
By March 31, 2023	Committee proposes final recommendations with timeline to address identified concerns
By April 30, 2023	BOE holds town hall meetings on draft proposals
By June 30, 2023	BOE adopts final facilities and usage plan that addresses racial imbalance needs