

Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford

The Legislation and Policy Development Committee
Wednesday, April 6, 2022, 8:30 a.m.

Committee Members

Malia K. Sieve, Chair
Karen Dubois-Walton, Donald F. Harris, Bonnie E. Burr, Robert Trefry
Martha Paluch Prou and Elwood Exley, Jr.

Minutes
(Approved June 1, 2022)

Pursuant to notice filed with the Secretary of the State, the Board of Education Legislation and Policy Development Committee met in person on April 6, 2022.

I. Call to Order

Committee Chair Malia K. Sieve called the meeting to order. Also present were Committee Members Karen DuBois-Walton, Donald F. Harris, Bonnie E. Burr, Elwood Exley, Jr., and Robert Trefry. In addition, the following were also in attendance: Michael McKeon, Director of Legal and Governmental Affairs; Irene Parisi, Chief Academic Officer; Keith Norton, Chief Strategic Planning Officer; Laura Anastasio, Attorney, Legal and Governmental Affairs Office; Sonya Efiyanayi, Secretary.

Presenter:

Laura Anastasio, Attorney, Legal and Governmental Affairs Office, CSDE

II. Review and Discussion: Status of Racial Imbalance

Ms. Sieve opened the meeting by noting that representatives from the West Hartford Board of Education, who were originally scheduled to meet with the Committee, had advised that they would be unable to do so due to what Attorney Anastasio explained was a student health emergency.

Ms. Sieve asked for a vote regarding the approval of the minutes of the Committee's December 14, 2021 special meeting and the minutes of its March 6, 2022 regular meeting. Ms. Burr moved that both sets of minutes be approved, and Mr. Harris seconded. There was no further discussion, and the Committee voted unanimously to approve the two sets of minutes.

Attorney Anastasio discussed with the Committee the most recent racial imbalance numbers at West Hartford's Charter Oak School, adding that as they had not yet been formally approved by the State Board, they were still only for discussion. Charter Oak had been on the racially imbalanced list since 1999, but its new, lower numbers would move it to the impending imbalance list. Smith Elementary School had similarly transitioned approximately four years earlier. Braeburn and Bugbee Elementary Schools, however, are now also on the impending imbalance list.

Attorney Anastasio reviewed some of the history of Charter Oak and Smith, noting that in the mid-1990s, then-Commissioner Sergi had granted them “special schools” status given that they had voluntary, cross-district enrollment. At the same time, West Hartford permitted students in the schools’ respective neighborhoods to also attend, resulting in the discordance in minority enrollment between those schools and the Town’s other elementary schools. Given this disparity, then-Commissioner McQuillan discussed possibly revoking the special designation were the numbers to persist. Mr. Norton observed that if Charter Oak and Smith were to be treated as true magnet schools, West Hartford could better balance the student population. Ms. Sieve questioned whether Charter Oak continues to require this special designation

Dr. DuBois-Walton suggested that the Committee develop language that answers the question of why addressing racial balance is important for everyone, not only non-white students. Dr. DuBois-Walton suggested the Committee obtain and review data that could speak to the potential correlations between racial balance, academic performance, and other outcomes. Ms. Sieve and Dr. DuBois-Walton noted that such data would better inform the discussion regarding racially imbalanced schools. Ms. Burr added that longitudinal data would also be helpful.

The Committee then discussed their scheduled May 4, 2022 meeting with representatives of the Fairfield Board regarding the racial imbalance at McKinley Elementary School as well as Fairfield’s January 20, 2022 proposed timeline for addressing it. The Committee had previously heard from Fairfield’s representatives at the Committee’s November 3, 2021 meeting. Ms. Sieve suggested that in light of the persistent numbers at McKinley and Fairfield’s January 20, 2022 proposed timeline, it would be constructive to have Fairfield’s representatives meet with the full Board. Dr. DuBois-Walton and Ms. Sieve noted the importance of having the Board understand the ongoing status of McKinley’s racial imbalance and be able to ask questions as to Fairfield’s proposed remediation and timeline. There was also discussion about possibly having Fairfield return to the Committee in August 2022 with a new timeline.

Ms. Burr moved and Mr. Exley seconded referring Fairfield to the full Board at its May 4, 2022 meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

V. Adjournment

The Committee adjourned at 9:30 a.m.

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