

**Connecticut State Board of Education**  
**Hartford**

**Legislation and Policy Development Committee**  
Wednesday, November 2, 2022, 8:30 a.m.

**Committee Members**

Malia K. Sieve, Chair  
Karen DuBois-Walton, Donald F. Harris, Bonnie E. Burr,  
Martha Paluch Prou, Elwood Exley, Jr., and Valli Pendyala

**Minutes**  
**(Approved December 7, 2022)**

Pursuant to notice filed with the Secretary of the State, the Board of Education Legislation and Policy Development Committee met in person on November 2, 2022.

**I. Call to Order**

Committee Chair Malia K. Sieve called the meeting to order. Also attending the meeting were Committee Members Karen DuBois-Walton, Donald F. Harris, Bonnie E. Burr, Elwood Exley, Jr., and Valli Pendyala. In addition, the following individuals from the CSDE were in attendance: Michael McKeon, Director of Legal and Governmental Affairs; and Laura Anastasio, Attorney, Legal and Governmental Affairs.

**Presenters:**

Laura Anastasio, Attorney, CSDE Legal and Governmental Affairs  
Gary Highsmith, Superintendent of the Hamden Public Schools

**II. Approval of Minutes**

Dr. DuBois-Walton moved to approve the June 1, 2022, meeting minutes, and Mr. Harris seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Exley moved to approve the September 7, 2022, meeting minutes, and Dr. DuBois-Walton seconded. The voting members of the Committee unanimously voted in favor of the motion with the exception of Ms. Burr, who abstained as she had not been at the September 7 meeting.

Mr. Harris moved to approve the October 12, 2022, meeting minutes, and Dr. DuBois-Walton seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**III. Review and Discussion: Hamden Board of Education Racial Imbalance Plan**

Attorney Anastasio provided a brief introduction, reviewing the Hamden Board of Education racial imbalance plan and the applicable student percentages. She then introduced Gary Highsmith, the Superintendent of the Hamden Public Schools.

Mr. Highsmith noted that he was still relatively new to the district, having only been Superintendent for 62 days, and that there were multiple new administrators in the school

district as well as turnover on the Hamden Board, only two members of which remain from the prior Board. He referenced a pre-meeting conversation he had had with Attorney Anastasio regarding questions the latter had asked regarding the Hamden racial imbalance plan, and he expanded upon the various points that Attorney Anastasio had raised with him during their meeting.

Mr. Highsmith stated that the Hamden Board is committed to adding sixth grade to the middle school as a means of racially balancing the student population. The estimated cost of this has doubled to \$22 million, but the Hamden Board is committed to it. Hamden received a priority construction grant from the State of Connecticut, with an 80% reimbursement rate, the additional 10% having been due to the effect this construction would have on racial balancing.

Mr. Highsmith noted, however, that the creation of a magnet school, which had been part of Hamden's current plan, is no longer financially feasible and therefore no longer planned. The Hamden Board is also committed to expanding the district's Pre-K programming, but in doing so, it does not wish to adversely affect the city's private, daycare providers, the majority of which are women of color. Mr. Highsmith also discussed the idea of what he termed "sister schools," which would restructure elementary schools into separate facilities for grades K-through-2 and 3-through-5. This potential change is still being studied to determine how it would affect the schools' racial balance.

Dr. DuBois-Walton congratulated Mr. Highsmith on his having marshaled all of the information he shared with the Committee, including his knowledge of the district's racial-balance background, in such a short period of time. She inquired about timeframes for these potential efforts. Mr. Highsmith responded that the planning meetings are ongoing, and that he is attending two such meetings per month. Additionally, he is hoping to obtain the Hamden Board's approval of a Diversity and Inclusion Director job description by December.

Ms. Sieve asked when the district's adjustments resulting from the sale of Wintergreen School would be realized, which Mr. Highsmith estimated would be Fall 2023, with additional adjustments required for the following 2024-2025 school year due to the middle school project. In response to Dr. DuBois-Walton's question regarding the timing of the sister school implementation, Mr. Highsmith stated it would be the 2024-2025 school year. Ms. Burr complimented Mr. Highsmith for having so quickly become fully versed on this issue and the proposed interventions.

Dr. DuBois-Walton asked about the Hamden Board's level of commitment to racial balance, and Mr. Highsmith stressed that the Board was extremely committed, and that this commitment was universal across the political spectrum. Attorney Anastasio asked what effect the movement of sixth grade to the middle school would have on racial balance and further inquired as to whether it was possible to subsequently shuffle students among the various elementary schools. Mr. Highsmith noted that the answers to these questions would be clarified by the impact of the sister-school project.

Given that the proposals shared by Mr. Highsmith are different from the Hamden Board's current racial imbalance plan, Ms. Sieve asked how that divergence could be reconciled.

Attorney Anastasio explained that the district would have to craft an amended plan, have the Hamden Board approve it, and then submit it to the State Board of Education for its approval. Dr. DuBois-Walton believed that that sounded reasonable. Ms. Sieve suggested that Mr. Highsmith return in six months to report on the status of Hamden's new approach, which both Attorney Anastasio and Ms. Burr thought reasonable.

#### **IV. Additional Discussion**

Committee members discussed the December meeting, including rescheduling the Greenwich Board of Education's update on the status of its racial balance plan until the Committee's January 2023 meeting. Ms. Burr noted that she sometimes feels that the Committee is rushed and should consider scheduling more time for its meetings. The Committee discussed the possibility of finding a new and longer meeting time, which will be further addressed at the December 7, 2022 meeting.

#### **V. Adjournment**

The Committee adjourned at 9:30 a.m.

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