

Superintendent Clarifies Recent School Redistricting Study

The purpose of this email message is to provide everyone with some background information regarding a redistricting report the Board of Education received at its last meeting and reported in the Hartford Courant last Thursday. The report focused on redistricting plans to achieve racially balanced schools based on several elementary school building options currently under discussion by the town's SMARTR Committee. The SMARTR Committee, which includes representative from the Board of Directors, Board of Education, and the public, is charged with the responsibility to identify: (1) the number of schools required to provide appropriate and sustainable educational facilities for the next generation; (2) the impact on enrollment and student demographic data, the impact on grade level configuration and achieving racially balanced schools; (3) the impact of curriculum and instructional changes over the next twenty years on school design and functional use of school building space; and (4) necessary capital improvements.

Last year, the Board of Education did approve a SMARTR Committee school grade reorganization plan that included grade K-4 elementary schools, a grade 5-6 intermediate school, a middle school including grade 7-8, and high school housing grades 9-12. As a result, the Board of Directors plans to place a referendum before the town in April for the construction of a grade 5 school building adjacent and connected to the Bennet Academy. Public hearings will be held on this project before the April referendum.

At the May 28, 2013 Board of Education meeting, Mr. Brian Murphy, chair of the town's building committee and member of the SMARTR Committee reported that the SMARTR Committee is considering, consistent with its charge, several elementary school projects including the construction of one or two larger elementary schools of 530 students allowing the town to receive the highest rate of reimbursement available for school construction. Larger elementary schools would likely result in the closing of one or possibly two elementary schools resulting in an additional reduction in school operational costs. The schools identified as possible sites for these larger schools include Robertson, Washington, and Verplanck. Manchester's current largest elementary school is Bowers School at 427 students.

The Board of Education directed Dr. Kisiel to complete a study of the impact of the construction of these larger elementary schools on 1) school enrollment, 2) the level of redistricting needed to achieve these plans, and 3) the impact on racial balance. The report last week revealed that depending on the location and the number of these larger schools, the redistricting plan could result in the closing of Washington, Verplanck, and/or Waddell schools.

The Board of Education has not received a final recommendation from the SMARTR Committee, nor has it made any determination regarding specific school construction projects. The SMARTR Committee will be meeting in a joint session of the Board of Directors and Board of Education in early December to provide a status report of its study and recommendations.