

**Red Clay Consolidated School District
Neighborhood Schools Plan
Resubmitted May 28, 2002**



BOARD MEMBERS

**Irwin J. Becnel, Jr.
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Toni T. Eaton
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Martin A. Wilson**

**Robert J. Andrzejewski
Chief Executive Officer**

Introduction

The State Board, in its decision of March 26, 2002, disapproved the Red Clay plan submitted to comply with the Neighborhood Schools Act. The State Board then directed the District to submit a revised plan that would assign every student to the closest geographic school. Red Clay Consolidated School District, as a matter of law, disagrees with the decision reached by the State Board. Red Clay Consolidated School District continues to maintain that the plan it submitted is in conformity with all aspects of the Neighborhood Schools Act. Red Clay reserves its right to maintain and argue this position should there be any future disputes between Red Clay and the State Board or others concerning this issue. Nevertheless, Red Clay desires the State Board's approval and is submitting this plan in an effort to meet the requirements of the Neighborhood Schools Act as interpreted by the State Board.

The State Board has directed that Red Clay assign each student to the closest school. However, assigning students to the closest geographic school will create overcrowded and underutilized schools.

Based on current enrollment and school capacity data, the district currently has a balanced utilization of its school facilities. Throughout the district, the current percentage of utilization ranges from 74% - 112%. Overall, 14 of 21 or 66% of the schools are within 10% of the ideal utilization of the school and 19 of the 21, or 90% of the schools, are within 20% of the ideal utilization.

Reassigning students to the closest geographic school would create overcrowding or underutilization in 85% of the district's elementary schools. Only 15%, or 2 of the 13 elementary schools, would remain within 10% of the current school utilization. Of the 7,145 elementary students 2,730 students would attend underutilized schools and 3,303 students would attend overcrowded schools. Only 1,112 students would attend schools that were not crowded or underutilized.

SCHOOL	Program Capacity	Current Enrollment	Current Utilization	NS Enrollment	NS Utilization
Forest Oak	647	647	100%	263	41%
Heritage	508	533	105%	352	69%
Highlands	337	358	106%	143	42%
Lewis	486	464	95%	1209	249%
Shortlidge	564	481	85%	541	96%
Linden Hill	552	553	100%	993	179%
Baltz	948	811	86%	805	85%
Richardson Park	612	619	101%	544	89%
Marbrook	546	532	97%	314	58%
Richey	354	418	118%	517	146%
Brandywine Springs	580	607	105%	571	98%
Mote	521	467	90%	584	112%
Warner	1165	885	76%	309	27%
Elem. Total	7820	7375		7145	

Current Enrollment includes out-of-district Choice.

Neighborhood School Enrollment does not include out-of-district Choice students.

This pattern is consistent with the secondary schools. Currently, 4 of 8 or 50% of the secondary schools are within 10% of ideal utilization and 7 of 8 or 88% are within 20 % of ideal utilization. Reassigning students to the closest secondary school would result in 2 of 8 or 25% of schools remaining within 10% of ideal utilization. Of the 7,725 secondary students, 5,778 or 75% of the students would be attending schools that are overcrowded or underutilized. If students were assigned to the closest school to home, the percentage of utilization would range from 27% - 249%, as compared to the current range of 74% - 112%.

SCHOOL	Program Capacity	Current Enrollment	Current Utilization	NS Enrollment	NS Utilization
AI Middle	628	607	97%	1277	203%
HB Middle	766	855	112%	462	60%
Skyline	712	689	97%	623	88%
Stanton	759	630	83%	538	71%
Conrad	988	734	74%	895	91%
MS Total	3853	3515		3795	
Dickinson	1045	1038	99%	1052	101%
AI DuPont High	1155	1265	110%	1835	159%
McKean	1326	1298	98%	1043	79%
HS Total	3526	3601		3930	

Cab Calloway students are included in NS enrollment, however, they are likely to choice to Cab reducing enrollment in some secondary schools.

These data presented shows that it would be physically impossible to assign students to the closest geographic school. The district does not have schools located in areas with high concentrations of student population. In order to implement a closest school assignment, the District would need to construct an elementary, middle, and high school. The cost for school construction is listed below.

Elementary School	650 Students	\$11,088,425
Middle School	750 Students	\$17,872,875
High School	1200 Students	\$30,968,875

Land acquisition costs are included.

In addition to overcrowding and underutilization, assigning students to the closest geographic school would create high poverty schools. The most significant difference in poverty levels (% of students receiving free and reduced lunch) will occur at the middle and high schools. Assigning students to the closest secondary school will increase the poverty level in schools that currently have the highest poverty, and decrease the poverty levels in schools that currently have the lowest poverty levels. Only one middle school, Conrad, will remain within a 10% difference in poverty levels when comparing the current enrollment to the closest school enrollment. The following chart indicates the changes in poverty levels at the secondary schools.

SCHOOL	CURRENT FREE/REDUCED LUNCH	NS FREE/REDUCED LUNCH	CHANGE IN POVERTY LEVEL
A. I. duPont Middle	56%	75%	19%+
H. B. duPont Middle	26%	3%	23%-
Stanton Middle	40%	28%	12%-
Skyline Middle	26%	9%	17%-
Conrad Middle	57%	47%	10%-
Dickinson High	29%	17%	12%-
A. I. duPont High	31%	51%	20%+
McKean High	24%	3%	21%-

Seven of the district's eight secondary schools will experience significant changes in the poverty levels when students are assigned to the closest school. The disparity in poverty levels among the secondary schools will increase as compared to the poverty levels under the current enrollment. Two of the schools will have over 50% of their student population receiving free and reduced lunch and three schools will have less than 10% of their students receiving free and reduced lunches. The current range of poverty levels is 24% - 57%. Under the closest school assignment the range of poverty levels will increase to 3% - 75%.

The Red Clay Consolidated School District believes that the changes in enrollment and poverty levels that occur when students are assigned to the closest school create a significant hardship for the district and the students. Underutilized schools will not generate sufficient unit counts to maintain the current program offerings. Limited staffing has the potential to inflate class size and reduce exploratory or related arts programs.

Overutilized schools will experience difficulties in scheduling common areas of the building such as the cafeteria, library, gymnasium, and computer labs. Class size will rise significantly due to space limitation. Course offerings may be limited due to availability of classroom space. In both overcrowded and underutilized schools, significant faculty reassignments will be required. In addition, classroom furniture, instructional materials, supplies, and instructional technology will be relocated to different facilities.

Educational research has demonstrated that students of high poverty require additional resources to educate. Assigning students to the closest school creates additional high poverty schools as well as dramatically increasing the range of low poverty and high poverty schools in Red Clay. Although some high poverty schools are successful, research clearly suggests a high correlation between poverty and academic performance. Results from the most recent Delaware School Ratings also suggest that high poverty schools are not as successful. Creating high poverty schools is a hardship to the students attending those schools. In addition, the complete reallocation of the current resources, staff, and programs used to educate high poverty students would be a hardship to the district.

Clearly, the financial burden of constructing new schools would be a significant hardship on the district and its citizens. It would be ill advised to ask the citizens to support the construction of new schools when sufficient space is available in other schools within the district. Furthermore, the recent passage of a capital referendum will allow the district to add space to existing schools in areas of increased student enrollment. The referendum also includes the construction of a new elementary school in the northwest portion of the district that does not currently have an elementary school.

In light of the substantial hardship that the above plan would cause, Red Clay respectfully requests that the State Board approve, under the rubric of a substantial hardship, * the plan previously submitted by Red Clay to the State Board and which was discussed in the State Board's opinion of March 26, 2002. However, it must be noted that in compliance with the State Board's decision, Red Clay is submitting this plan, not in an effort to convince the State Board that Red Clay's original position was correct, but rather as the preferred alternative to the above described assignment plan which would create a substantial hardship to the District.

*Red Clay did not assert hardship in its District filing due to its good faith belief that the plan complied with the Neighborhood Schools Act.

Clarification of Red Clay Policies, Practices, and Proposals

The narrative of the State Board of Education's decision indicates a possible misunderstanding of several aspects of the Red Clay feeder patterns, policies, and practices. The following clarification is provided to assist the Board in understanding the District's choice process and its rationale for this Neighborhood Schools Plan.

High School Feeder Patterns

Not all students from the city were assigned to Wilmington High School. While segments of the city did have that feeder assignment, city students were assigned to all four of the district high schools in 1978 and when the district revised the original feeder pattern assignments in 1990.

Currently, 72% of the district high school students who reside in the former Wilmington feeder are located in the suburbs. Some areas of Greenville, Elsmere, and Richardson Park, as well as an area of Stanton, were all assigned to Wilmington High School and, consequently, have no existing feeder.

The accommodation made by the Board of Education is to guarantee those students in the former Wilmington High School feeder pattern their first choice high school assignment if they submit a choice application by the state deadline. This practice has been in place since 1996 when the school choice law was first implemented.

Brandywine Springs Preference Zone

The decision of the State Board of Education makes several references to the operation and impact of the preference zone for Brandywine Springs. To clarify the procedure under school choice, no space is "reserved" for students who live in the preference zone; those students are given the first preference for any seats that are available or are placed first on the wait list for those grades where there is no space available.

The State Board of Education also questioned whether the preference zone established for students living near Brandywine Springs (and the one to be created for the Hockessin school) is fair to other students in the district. This preference is similar to other schools in the district. All students who live within a walking zone of a school are assigned to that school for the feeder pattern grades of the school. It is not labeled a preference since it is an assignment. Any feeder pattern preferences are therefore accorded to the nearest residents, as well as students, who have had the school as a feeder assignment, even though they may not live near the school. All other students would have at least two, and sometimes three, schools with a feeder pattern preference. The Brandywine Springs preference zone is comparable to the walker feeder zones for other elementary schools. Therefore, students in the Brandywine Springs preference zone have similar preferences.

to students in other elementary schools. **However, if the State Board so requires, in order to meet the fair and equitable standards cited in its decision, the District would be willing to remove the feeder pattern preference and rely solely on the geographic preference zone as the preference for students at Brandywine Springs Elementary School.**

Public Comment

The State Board appeared to place great weight on the public comment it received. The District contends that the Board received a statistically insignificant number of comments (12) when compared to the number of families (over 10,000) in this district or to the number of families filing choice applications (over 4,000). Furthermore, the Board acknowledged in its decision that the comments were as a result of the lack of capacity and the reconfiguration process, rather than the misapplication of choice policy. Indeed, lack of any comment is an indication of public support for the Red Clay plan.

Student Assignment by Race (Policy JECD)

The District school choice policy references a policy adopted in July 1993 to address the issue of school racial balance under the high school choice plan adopted prior to the lifting of the court order and the enactment of the school choice law. That policy clarifies the affirmative action the district takes to ensure that the racial balance of its choice invitees represents the racial make-up of the applicants. While it is statistically probable that students selected by a random process will reflect the applicant pool, the district policy is designed to assure that outcome and not allow a simple dependence on probability. This policy turns statistical probability into certainty.

Neighborhood School Zones

Three school zones have been created based on geographic proximity that contain enough seats to hold all the students currently residing within the zone (regardless of where they are currently attending school). With the addition of the new school in Hockessin, it will be possible to create four zones. It is the district's plan to assure that students who fail to gain entrance to any of their three choices of schools and who do not wish to be assigned to their feeder school, will be enrolled in a school within the neighborhood zone. In fact, this designated zone serves to create a "closest school" assignment; families will not know which of the four schools will be their school, but they will be assured that they will not attend a school across the district unless they choose to do so. The proposed elementary school zones create a group of neighborhood schools, when a single neighborhood school is impossible to achieve for every student.

Historical Feeder Option

In its decision, the State Board noted that students who fail to submit choice applications would not have a school assignment until all choice applications were processed. The District would consider amending its proposal to keep the historical feeder pattern school assignment for all students who fail to submit applications if necessary to meet the fair and equitable standards cited by the Board.

Transportation

The District currently operates a transportation system based on the historical feeder patterns for schools. In most cases, students are transported to a school from both suburban and city locations. All of the suburban elementary schools with feeder patterns have school buses that transport students from the city. All of the city schools have students transported from the suburban locations. In some schools, students are transported from one end of the district to the other.

Students enrolled in a school through choice must get to an existing bus stop within the feeder pattern or provide their own transportation. If the child does not reside within a feeder pattern for any grades of the choice school, a bus stop may not be nearby or convenient.

If the District implements the Neighborhood Schools Zone, the entire zone would contain existing bus stops for all schools within the zone. Therefore, if a student is assigned to or chooses a school within the zone, transportation is available.

If students choose schools outside the Neighborhood Schools Zone, they must get to an existing bus stop within the zone. Since bus stops will be located throughout the zone, parents will be afforded significantly more options for locating bus stops.

In addition to the benefits to students and parents, this plan has the potential for cost savings for the District and State. The District will no longer have to send all of its elementary buses to the same location to pick up students and deliver them throughout the district. School buses will serve a limited number of schools and travel only within a narrow geographic zone. This plan will eliminate the need for an elementary school bus to travel across the entire district to transport students.

Overview of Red Clay Neighborhood Schools Plan

- ❖ All students at grades K, 6, and 9 and grades 3 or 4 (transition years) in selected schools who fail to submit a choice application (or who submit an application with three choices and receive no invitation) will be assigned to a school within this neighborhood school zone. Students in other than transition years need not fill out a choice application to stay in that school.
- ❖ Definition of the neighborhood school zone: The district will be divided into three residential zones for elementary school assignments and students will be assigned to the closest school within the zone with space available after the school choice invitations have been issued using the district school choice policy.

- ❖ The three zones are:

<u>ZONE 1</u>	<u>ZONE 2</u>	<u>ZONE 3</u>
Highlands	Baltz	Forest Oak
Lewis	Richardson Park	Heritage
Shortlidge	Richey	Linden Hill
Warner		Marbrook
		Mote
		Brandywine Springs

- ❖ Brandywine Springs will be added to Zone 3. Any new school will be added to a zone. Additional schools may result in the creation of additional or revised zones.
- ❖ Neighborhood Schools Zone schools are not identified at the middle and high school levels. At those levels, students will be assigned to the nearest school with available spaces if they fail to apply to a school through the choice process.
- ❖ Elementary schools will be a K-5 grade configuration. All students who enter the school at kindergarten and grade 3 in 2003 can remain in the school for the remainder of the elementary school years.

Proposed Process

Each resident student is registered to attend school. All students entering grades K, 6 and 9 and all students new to the district will be asked to complete a choice application.

If an application is completed and there is space in the school of choice, an invitation is issued. If there is not space available in the school, the student is placed on the “wait list” and is assigned to the closest school with space available (if second and third choice schools are also unavailable). If a child selects their historical feeder pattern school as a choice school, an invitation to the feeder pattern school will be issued.

If a student fails to complete a choice application, the student will be assigned to the closest school with space available (after the choice invitation process has been completed).

Grade 3 and 4 Applications

When Red Clay established feeder patterns for elementary schools not all schools had K-5 grade configurations. Some schools were K-2 grade configurations and some schools were 4-5 grade configurations. Feeder patterns were developed, and students were assigned to schools in sufficient numbers to reach the school’s program capacity. When grades were added to these schools, students were not assigned through feeder patterns. The added grades were filled only through choice. However, the added grades could not be large enough to accommodate the same number of students enrolled in the feeder grades. Currently there are more students in feeder grades than there are in the added choice grades within a school.

When the district implements the Neighborhood Schools Plan in 2003, it will be able to control enrollment at the entry-level grade (kindergarten). The district will also need to control enrollment at the added choice grades until the September 2003 kindergarten class reaches the added grade (September 2007). If both feeder grades and choice grades are equal in number, then choice applications will be required only at the entry-level grade.

Conclusion

The Red Clay Consolidated School District contends that the assigning students to the closest geographic school will create a substantial hardship to the District and its students. The District has submitted ample data to show that assignment to the closest school will create overcrowded and underutilized schools. It will also increase the range of poverty levels among schools as well as create additional high poverty schools. The District has shown that attempts to accommodate the changes in enrollment and poverty will also lead to substantial hardship. The reallocation of existing instructional and human resources would significantly alter the current program offerings throughout the district and the passage of a referendum to fund new construction would be unlikely.

Red Clay respectfully requests that the State Board approve, under the rubric of a substantial hardship, the plan previously submitted by Red Clay to the State Board. In this proposal the District has provided an overview of the plan described in greater detail in the prior submission. In addition, the District has provided clarification on several aspects of the proposal to assist the Board in understanding the District's rationale for this plan as an acceptable alternative to the significant hardship created by assigning students to the geographic closest school. In particular, the District provided clarification in the following areas:

High School Feeder Patterns
Brandywine Springs Preference Zone
Historical Feeder Option
Public Comment
Choice Policy (JECD)
Transportation

The Red Clay Consolidated School District desires the State Board's recognition that assigning students to the closest geographic school will create a substantial hardship to the district. The District also requests that the State Board approve the plan previously submitted as an alternate plan to comply with the Neighborhood Schools Act.