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## Balancing student populations by race affects bus costs

By Elizabeth G. Howard on October 3, 2014 in Latest News, Lead News, School News · 3 Comments



Superintendent of Schools Dr. Janet Robinson. Greg Reilly photo.

### About author



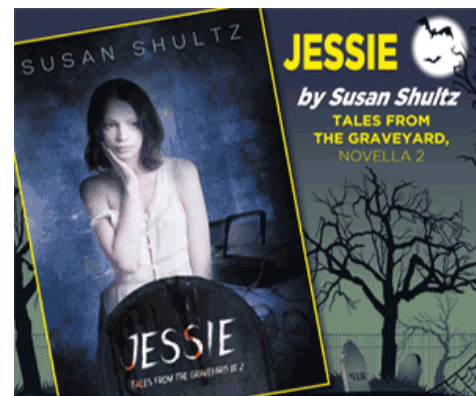
Elizabeth G. Howard

Elizabeth Howard is a Stratford-based journalist, blogger and poet. She writes on the arts,

According to an independent analysis commissioned by the Stratford Board of Education, state-mandated racial balancing of school populations impacts busing efficiencies in the Stratford school district more than any other variable factor.

The school assignment plan — also known as racial balancing — was one of three key factors that analysts found impacting busing efficiency in the district.

The school board hired Transportation Advisory Services (TAS) to conduct an analysis of the school district's busing program, including all aspects of public, non-public and special education transportation services, including costs, and



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« JUNE 2015 »						
MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	1	2	3	4	5
TUE 02	<b>Senior calendar: May 29-June 4</b> June 1 @ 8:30 am - June 4 @ 4:00 pm					
TUE 02	<b>Catholic Daughters meeting</b> June 2 @ 6:30 pm					

TAS submitted its report in April.  
(For more on the report, see 'Bus services' in this edition.)

#### What it means

Connecticut's State Department of Education requires school districts to adhere to regulations spelled out in the state's Racial Imbalance Law, which says that the proportion of minority students to white students in each school must be comparable to the numbers in the whole district. Each school's proportion must fall within 15 percentage points to 25 percentage points of the district's overall proportion in comparable grades.

According to Dr. Janet Robinson, superintendent of Stratford schools, Stratford's current overall minority population is 54% of the total.

That number has increased from 50% in the last few years, said Board of Education Chairman Andrea Veilleux.

To comply with the state mandate, the district must arrange for the minority population of each school to be within 15 to 25 percentage points of that 54% minority population number. Achieving that arrangement calls for busing students from their neighborhoods to other schools, and that affects the district's transportation costs, which are currently budgeted at \$4.5 million per year.

Veilleux noted that the district's transportation expenditures reflect the district's response to the state mandate, and, still, Stratford's current per-student transportation expenditure is \$602, "lower than that of our District Reference Group of \$732 and of the overall state (\$724)."

"The [transportation study] was conducted to see if potential cost savings and efficiencies could be found in the transportation program," Veilleux said. "The study focused on the transportation program and not educational decisions. The report suggests many recommendations for potential cost savings and everything is on the table for discussion. The BOE spends money on transportation to be in compliance with state statute."

The Racial Imbalance Law requires schools to submit annually "the racial composition of each school by grade, the racial composition of the teaching staff of each school, and the number of pupils in each elementary school who are eligible to receive free or reduced price lunches pursuant to federal law and regulation."

According to the state Board of Education mandate, a pupil or teacher is considered a minority if his or her "race is defined as other than white, or whose ethnicity is defined as Hispanic or Latino."

In Stratford, 26% of students attend a school "other than their official attendance school zone," the report found. Board of Ed policy 3541 states a student's maximum walking distance for grades K through eight is 1.5 miles and two miles for grades nine through 12.

#### Robinson favors busing

"Every fall, parents call to say they want their child in their local school," Robinson said. "They say, 'I can see the school from my window.'" Robinson said she empathizes with parents, particularly those in the Stratford Academy area, who want their child to be able to walk to school. "I think that is absolutely normal, that there is comfort having your child attend school down the block," Robinson said.

At the same time she said she sees "busing for equity" as a positive impact on the community. "It is a very diverse community. I feel it is ethically the right thing to do. Until our neighborhoods are balanced, we will have to be busing students."

"Our kids here have such advantage," the superintendent said. "When they get out in the world, they are not going to be stunned to see people who are different than them. When I go to high school events and I see the mixture of students all hanging out together, and they are friends, it is really gratifying."

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02 June 2 @ 7:00 pm

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04 **Mark Hirschbeck**  
June 4 @ 10:00 am

THU **Thursday Night Ballroom Dance**  
04 **Party**  
June 4 @ 7:30 pm - 11:00 pm



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### Difficult task

The state race balancing mandate's impact on bus routing efficiency, the report found, was highest in elementary schools. In a test boundary of one mile drawn around Stratford Academy, for example, the study finds 420 students who are "receiving transportation to a different public elementary school in the district."

Stratford Academy is the town's only magnet school, located in the south end of Stratford.

Determining which students attend which schools is one of the most complicated tasks the board manages, Robinson said. Abiding by the regulations of racial balancing, working toward bus efficiencies while also responding to late enrollments and parent requests and waivers, requires serious logistics.

"The district has stayed very close to 15%," Robinson said, "but with many late enrollments and very few slots in our elementary schools, it has been very hard. Most of our schools are totally full."

The cost of the TAS study, with follow-up consulting, was approximately \$16,000.

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**Ed of Ct.** · 8 months ago

This why parents abandon the state and or Homeschool their children etc.. WHY the state in a monetary crisis would transport students all over town for some mathematical formula is foolish and costly to say the least. I hope we get a new Gov. and state legislature to correct this expensive madness. Why someone would be bussed away from Wooster to Flood as my son was years ago makes no sense. This would explain why half of Ct. residents such as my son moved or would move out of Stratford and [Ct.as](#) soon as they could.

^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ›

**George Mulligan** · 8 months ago

I spoke with former BoE member who said he was surprised to find 54% of Stratford Students are minority.

I pointed out 43% of Stratford are over 50 years old and unlikely to have school age children. while there are 18-20% of Stratford under 18 years old = school age.

-

Recent CT POST article showed racial demographics of 34 CT Towns. Over 20 of those towns had under 2 % Black. All but 1 town had more Hispanic than Black. Stratford had about 12% Black, which is far less than cities, but far more than most towns. However the figures are deceiving. Parts of Stratford are just as segregated was most suburbs, which is why there is an added cost to busing minority students.

-

Every year Stratford gets Community grants of about \$ 700,000, which the Town Council Administers. Within the Community Development grants document it shows Stratford has 13 Districts and over 85 % of minorities live in just 3 of those 13 Districts.

-

Within the Community Development grants the Town council pays a salary to

[see more](#)

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