

Part 1: Case Analysis

A new black principal takes over the leadership of a predominantly white school and is immediately confronted with two problems. The first surrounds saving a busing program that helps fulfill a state mandate to integrate his nearly all-white school. Those bused are mostly underrepresented minority students with academic and behavior problems. The busing program presents a second, and more insidious problem for the principal. How to combat the racism baked into the fiber of the community because of its white supremacist past.

The stakeholders in this case include the staff and teachers at the school, the parents, and students on both sides of the issue---those that favor the busing plan and those opposed to it---and the district who enacted the program to a state requirement to desegregate Smith-Jackson Elementary School.

This “modern” problem at Smith-Jackson bears a striking resemblance to the busing issues of the 1950s and 1960s. It has been nearly 70 years since the Supreme Court struck down the notion of “separate but equal,” in *Brown v. Board of Education* but the battle to keep schools segregated seems to be rearing its head again (Essex, 2016). In one community after another white families seem to be banding together to exclude minority children from attending mostly white schools. The issue of racial segregation became so acute in the city of Hartford, a fourth grader became the lead plaintiff in the case of *Sheff v. O’Neill* in which the ACLU sought remedies to reverse racial segregation in Hartford public schools (ACLU, 2014).

The Orinda Union School District outlines the importance of educational equity in its policy manual. The district’s mission is to address marginalized learners and the value of diversity both inside and outside the classroom by removing, “practices, policies, and institutional barriers that

negatively influence student learning, perpetuate achievement gaps, and impede equal access to opportunities for all students” (OUSD Policy Board, 2019).

Still, endemic, and systematic racism in their community has to be one of the toughest hurdles an administrator must overcome. However, Smith-Jackson may be facing more than just community outrage for trying to integrate their schools. Failing to institute a state-mandated integration program *leaves the school and the district under the real possibility of a federal lawsuit*. Therefore, the Smith-Jackson principal’s most convincing appeal to his reluctant community is plainly state that either they come up with an integration program that is both legally compliant and palatable to the public, or the federal government will impose an integration program on them. Doing nothing is not an option.

Some solutions could include an “open-choice” program that allows students to transfer to the district schools they prefer. Making the voluntary busing program a lottery to which qualified students from underrepresented districts could apply. Or developing Smith-Jackson into an inter-district magnet school which would offer STEM and other programs that would not only attract, and benefit students being bused to the school, but would raise the level of education for students already at Smith-Jackson. The magnet school program is one that I as principal would pursue.

Here is a brief timeline for starting a magnet program at Smith-Jackson.

1. March-April 2023: Host a series of meetings with all stakeholders to purpose the magnet school idea. Answer questions. Attain a sign-off.
2. May 2023: District governing board approves the magnet program at Smith-Jackson

3. June 2023: Apply for federal funding to establish the magnet program through MSAP (Husch-Blackwell, 2022).
4. May-July 2023 Begin hiring and training for new STEM program.
5. August 2023: School starts with trained teachers and STEM program in place for existing and underrepresented students differentiated by ability.

Devising a successful STEM program at Smith-Jackson is certain to boost morale. Oftentimes with a racial divide, there seems to be thought that a minority is taking advantage of something (in this case a busing program) from which the majority white population does not benefit. In this solution, everyone benefits. Furthermore, the risk of legal action for not doing something far outweighs any risk of trying to chart this bold new path.

Part 2: Case Study Solution Rationale

There is a classic picture by the artist Normal Rockwell that typified the Civil Rights Movement in this country. It is called, "The Problem We All Live With." It depicts a young black girl being escorted by U.S. Marshals as she walks into a schoolhouse. Tomatoes are splattered on the wall behind her as evidence to the ridicule she received by merely trying to attend a segregated white school.



I have included the picture to focus the attention on who we serve as administrators. It is the children. In her expose on the racial divides brought on by a minority busing initiative at the Normandy School District in Normandy, Missouri, New York Times journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones uncovered the surprising fact that despite the variety of school reforms that administrators had tried to close the achievement gap between whites and minorities at public schools in this country, the one reform that seemed to work is one we all have pretty much given up on---school integration (Hannah-Jones, 2015).

Jones investigated schools across the country from North Carolina to the Midwest. She also conducted a longitudinal study tracing the academic gains of white and black students at schools that had been fully integrated starting in the 1970s. What she found was that test scores for minority students dramatically improved, while scores for white students stayed fairly constant. I use this research to support my idea of creating a STEM program at Smith-Jackson.

This is a solution-based idea can appeal to the underrepresented parents and students who undoubtedly feel the hostility at Smith-Jackson and therefore are pulling their children from the busing program rather than have them endure that hostility from the community. STEM offers something unique and something valuable that will set Smith-Jackson apart from other schools in the district. That “added value” will also be attractive to the white parents at Smith-Jackson. It will reinvigorate the academic excellence for which the school is known. Themed magnet programs that were started in the 1960s with the aim of increasing diversity at schools offer specialize instruction and academic rigor that has shown to be successful at schools around the country.

In 1970, four magnet elementary schools opened in Minneapolis. Each was curriculum focused and shared an admissions policy of “controlled choice” that promoted and fostered integration. The differentiation the magnet’s provided, so different from the standard public schools, helped all the students, black and white achieve incredible academic gains (Hinds, 2017).

Magnets tend to draw in parents. In a case like the one in Smith-Jackson that provides an additional benefit. Bringing parents together of different backgrounds, races and ethnicities for a common goal, the education of their children does not merely benefit students it can bring a community together. In Connecticut, the inter-district regional magnet schools developed in the wake of the State Supreme Court decision of *Sheff v. O’Neill* resulted in, “higher levels of racial diversity, better academic and social/emotional outcomes compared to non-magnet schools” (Siegel-Hawley/Frankenber, 2011).

Turning Smith-Jackson into a STEM magnet school cannot erase the racial animus in the community or its past connection to white supremacy. However, as has been stated previously, a state mandate on integration cannot be ignored. If nothing is done, lawsuits will surely follow.

Offering a STEM program at Smith-Jackson provide a new direction that might increase the educational opportunities of the disadvantaged students being bused to the school as well as those already living in the community. Taken together a magnet program has the potential of increasing the school's academic integrity and may bring the entire community together as they rally around one big success story.

Part 3: Agenda and Agenda Rationale

A successful STEM program does not just happen. Turning a standard public school into a successful magnet must be well-thought and planned. And as principal, I would not just host a single community listening event to “sell” this idea, but several. To each of these meetings I would invite an expert to explain the multiple benefits as well as the drawbacks of turning Smith-Jackson into a magnet STEM school.

Purpose:

The purpose of these meetings needs to be very focused on the five beneficial pillars and potential drawbacks of creating a magnet school at Smith-Jackson.

What sets magnet schools apart from other public schools are the following:

1. **Diversity:** A successful magnet school gives students a global educational experience with a student body that is reflective of the greater community.
2. **Innovative Curriculum:** Each magnet school has a particular theme which prepares students for higher education and career success.
3. **Academic Excellence:** High expectations are clearly articulated and multi-dimensional instruction on the needs of the student is the focus.

4. **High-Quality Instructional Systems:** Teachers and staff are well-educated and prepared. They are collaborative and centered on the needs of the student.
5. **Family and Community Partnerships:** Encouraging a system of support for students while promoting an “integrated educational environment (Barrington, 2022).

Goals & Objectives:

1. Showing how diversity in magnet schools is one of its primary goals as well as one of its greatest benefits.
2. Providing examples of how the new Smith-Jackson magnet will comprise of a curriculum that nurtures a child’s true interests.

Two suggested speakers:

1. These are elementary school students, of course, but I believe that even at this age, giving their parents an idea of what their children might eventually be able to do - or become- with the learning they receive at the Smith-Jackson magnet will help convince skeptical or reluctant parents that this idea is a solid choice. Because the idea is to pursue STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) introductory course, it would be a great idea to pepper these meeting with members of the business community that work in those fields. Perhaps also invite the Chamber of Commerce, as well as the head of a top engineering or architecture firm in town to outline the benefits of getting to experience these fields at a young age.

Detailed timeframe:

I envision these meetings taking place from March-April 2023: They would last at least two hours, enough time to answer every question that occurred to a parent or community member about the magnet school plan.

At least one of the meetings would be an “on site” at one of the more visual representations of a STEM career. I might have one of the speakers make their presentation at a nearby waterway, or an especially busy factory, or at a well-known building project. These examples give parents a realistic visualization of the fruits of their child getting a grounded education in STEM at the new Smith-Jackson Elementary School.

References

- ACLU. (2014, March 14). *Sheff v. O’Neill*. Retrieved on September 7, 2022, from <https://tinyurl.com/55r28knr>.
- Barrington, K. (2022, March 14). What are the benefits of magnet schools? Public School Review. Retrieved on September 6, 2022, from <https://tinyurl.com/yc46p9aa>.
- Essex, N. L. (2014). *School law and the public schools* (6th ed.). 483. Pearson.
- Hannah-Jones, N. (2015, August 7). The problem we all live with-part two. This American Life. [Audio Podcast]. NPR. <https://tinyurl.com/3dkskjxa>.
- Husch Blackwell.. (2022, March 10). U.S. department of education announces significant magnet school funding opportunity. Retrieved on September 7, 2022, from <https://tinyurl.com/44hfucks/>
- Orinda Union School District Board Policy Manual. (2019, March 11). Policy 5145/3:. Nondiscrimination/harassment. Retrieved September 5, 2022, from <https://tinyurl.com/mr3npf3k>.
- Siegel-Hawley, G., Frankenberg, E. (2011, October). Magnet school outcomes: what research says. The National Coalition on School Diversity. Brief 6. 3-4. <https://tinyurl.com/2ewhfvad>.

