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A VOICE AND A CHOICE FOR CONNECTICUT:
GOVERNOR WEICKER UNVEILS PLAN FOR QUALITY, INTEGRATED SCHOOLS

Governor Lowell P. Weicker Jr. today announced a sweeping program to provide a quality and integrated learning experience for all Connecticut public schoolchildren.

Governor Weicker's program requires that key decisions about the future of Connecticut schools be made at the local and regional level to ensure flexibility and to encourage communities to cooperate with each other in developing workable plans.

"The racial and economic isolation in Connecticut's school system is indisputable," Governor Weicker said in a speech before the General Assembly on the opening day of the 1993 legislative session.

"Whether this segregation came about through the chance of historical boundaries or economic forces beyond the control of the state or whether it came about through private decisions or in spite of the best educational efforts of the state, what matters is that it is here and that it must be dealt with," he continued.

Fundamental to the plan outlined by Governor Weicker is the belief that planning for the creation of quality, integrated schools must begin within individual communities. The plan lays out an ambitious timetable that starts the process in July 1993 and requires communities to begin meeting on a regional basis by late this fall.

"This process gives the communities of Connecticut a voice and a choice. I am confident we will not let the moment escape," he said.

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2. Planning would begin at the local level. Governor Weicker has proposed that individual communities begin July 1 to consider ways they can contribute to creating quality and integrated schools in their region. Participants will include the board of education chairman, school superintendent, administrators, teachers, parents and town officials, including the mayor or first selectman and any other group the community wants to involve.

3. By the end of November 1993, communities in all six regions must begin meeting to develop a five-year plan for submission to the State Board of Education. Plans must be submitted to the board by July 1994 for review and approval. All communities will be expected to participate in developing the regional plan.

Public hearings are an integral part of this phase.

PLAN CONTENTS

Each of the six regions will be expected to devise a five-year plan that fits with the individual circumstances and needs of their communities. For example, one region may consider interdistrict magnet schools while others may focus on school choice or on the development of regional schools.

Governor Weicker's proposal maintains local school district boundaries, although some regions may conclude that combining resources makes sense.

Each plan will be expected to address specific issues that include the following:

1. Program: Development of multi-cultural curriculum; grade organization; special needs programs, including bilingual, special education and the gifted; school calendar; school safety; construction and renovation of school buildings.

2. Staff: Recruitment and retention of minority teachers and staff; training; contract issues.

3. Finance: Fiscal authority for programs, school construction and renovation; governance.

4. Integration: Evidence that progress is being made in reducing the racial and economic isolation of all students on a school-by-school, region-wide basis.

A VOICE AND A CHOICE FOR CONNECTICUT:
CREATING QUALITY AND INTEGRATED SCHOOLS

Connecticut has long sought to integrate its public schools and to ensure equity in the classroom. Progress has been made, but it has been too little and too slow.

That is why the Weicker Administration is proposing a program that will engage every community in Connecticut in the development of regional plans to establish quality and integrated schools. Rather than watching the dreams of our children "dry up like a raisin in the sun" -- to use the words of Langston Hughes -- we can use our power to give them the breadth of educational opportunity that is each child's birthright.

The Weicker Administration proposal provides Connecticut communities with "a voice and a choice" in determining the future of their schools. Legislation to implement this program will be submitted to the General Assembly in February.

GOALS

Each of the 166 school districts in Connecticut must come together to plan and implement a program that will move toward improving achievement levels of our students and end both the racial and economic isolation that now exists in our schools.

Under a timetable proposed by the Weicker Administration, individual school districts and communities will begin in September 1995 to implement a regional five-year plan. Each region's unique five-year plan will establish goals for reducing isolation, promoting cross-cultural understanding and establishing a quality and integrated educational experience for all students.

Over the five-year period, school districts in the region will begin reflecting the racial makeup of the region-wide student population within limits that will be established in conjunction with the planning process.

PLANNING PROCESS

1. The Weicker Administration proposes a geographical configuration of six regions (map attached) that will permit local districts to retain control over fiscal, programmatic and personnel operations of their district while encouraging existing collaborative efforts.

The regions are largely consistent with the six current Regional Educational Service Centers and also mesh with the reorganization of state human service programs mandated by the General Assembly. This approach will directly link -- for the first time -- educational and social services for children. Under the Governor's plan, the state Department of Education will provide technical assistance at all stages of the process and planning funds and staff support at the regional level.

Governor Weicker urged the legislature to consider carefully his proposals and to act swiftly in addressing the needs of Connecticut's children. The Governor noted that Connecticut's educational system faces a legal challenge in Sheff vs. O'Neill, a lawsuit brought on behalf of 19 Hartford-area schoolchildren.

"It is not my intention to handicap the result of Sheff vs. O'Neill. Either way the court decides, there will be no winner. If the decision is for the plaintiffs, the courts, in the absence of any initiative by us, will run the schools of Connecticut and the children lose. If the decision is for the defendant, in the absence of any initiative by us, the children lose," the Governor said.

"A school system created by you, by local school boards, by the executive branch, will work better than the divinings of one or more jurists no matter how knowledgeable or sensitive those individuals might be," he continued.

Governor Weicker's plan is based on a geographical configuration of six regions consistent with the six regions for human service delivery mandated by the General Assembly as part of the reorganization of state government. The regions also build on existing interdistrict efforts, most of which are linked to the six Regional Educational Service Centers.

Over a five-year period, beginning in September 1995, each region will be responsible for moving all of its schools toward racial balance to reflect region-wide school demographics. Since the number of minority students differs from region to region, each group of communities would be expected to develop an approach that reflects their needs and resources.

Each regional five-year plan -- which would require approval from the State Board of Education -- would be comprehensive in nature, addressing issues ranging from curriculum and staffing, to fiscal authority and governance.

Legislation to implement the Governor's initiative will be submitted to the General Assembly in early February.

Governor Weicker's initiative was developed in consultation with the Commissioner of Education, Vincent Ferrandino and builds on work by the state Board of Education, which has focused on the issues of racial and economic isolation for many years. The Governor met Wednesday with members of the state Board of Education before making his announcement.

A succession of reports issued over the past five years has provided stark evidence of the differences between "the two

Connecticuts " -- one affluent, white and suburban; the other, poor, minority and urban.

"Today, despite all good intentions, there are two Connecticut when it comes to the education of our children, Connecticut separated by racial and economic divisions," the Governor told legislators. "There is a Connecticut of promise, as seen in its suburbs, and a Connecticut of despair as seen in its poverty-stricken cities."

Governor Weicker noted that 80 percent of Connecticut's minority students live in only 18 school districts -- Hartford public schools have a minority enrollment of 93 percent, while Bridgeport's minority enrollment is 86 percent and New Haven's is 82 percent. At the other extreme, 136 of Connecticut's 166 school districts have minority enrollments below 10 percent while 98 districts have a minority enrollment of less than 5 percent.

Statewide, minority enrollment is 25.7 percent.

Poor children are also clustered in Connecticut's cities in overwhelming proportions. Today, for example, 19 percent of all elementary schoolchildren qualify for the federal school lunch program of free and reduced-price meals. In Hartford, 63 percent of all students receive this assistance; in Bridgeport, 62 percent of all children and in New Haven, 49 percent.

Furthermore, the Strategic School Profile reports, issued for the first time in 1992, show that considerable disparities exist among racial groups and between wealthy and poor communities in terms of academic performance and achievement.

Urban schools did not perform as well as the state average on all measures of performance, including state mastery tests, physical fitness and the Scholastic Aptitude Test. Students from the affluent suburbs out-performed the state average on all measures of performance.

In December 1990, the report of the Governor's Commission on Quality and Integrated Education made sweeping recommendations to move Connecticut's public school system toward providing all of its students with a quality and integrated learning environment.

The Governor's proposals are consistent with that report, which called for development of magnet schools, expansion of interdistrict cooperative programs, creation of regions organized around the existing Regional Educational Service Centers and greater investment in such areas as preventive health care.

The commission noted in its report that "the majority of Connecticut's students are isolated from daily educational contact with students of other races and ethnic groups. It is time for all of us to break down the barriers that remain in our school districts, in our communities, in our schools and classrooms and in our hearts."

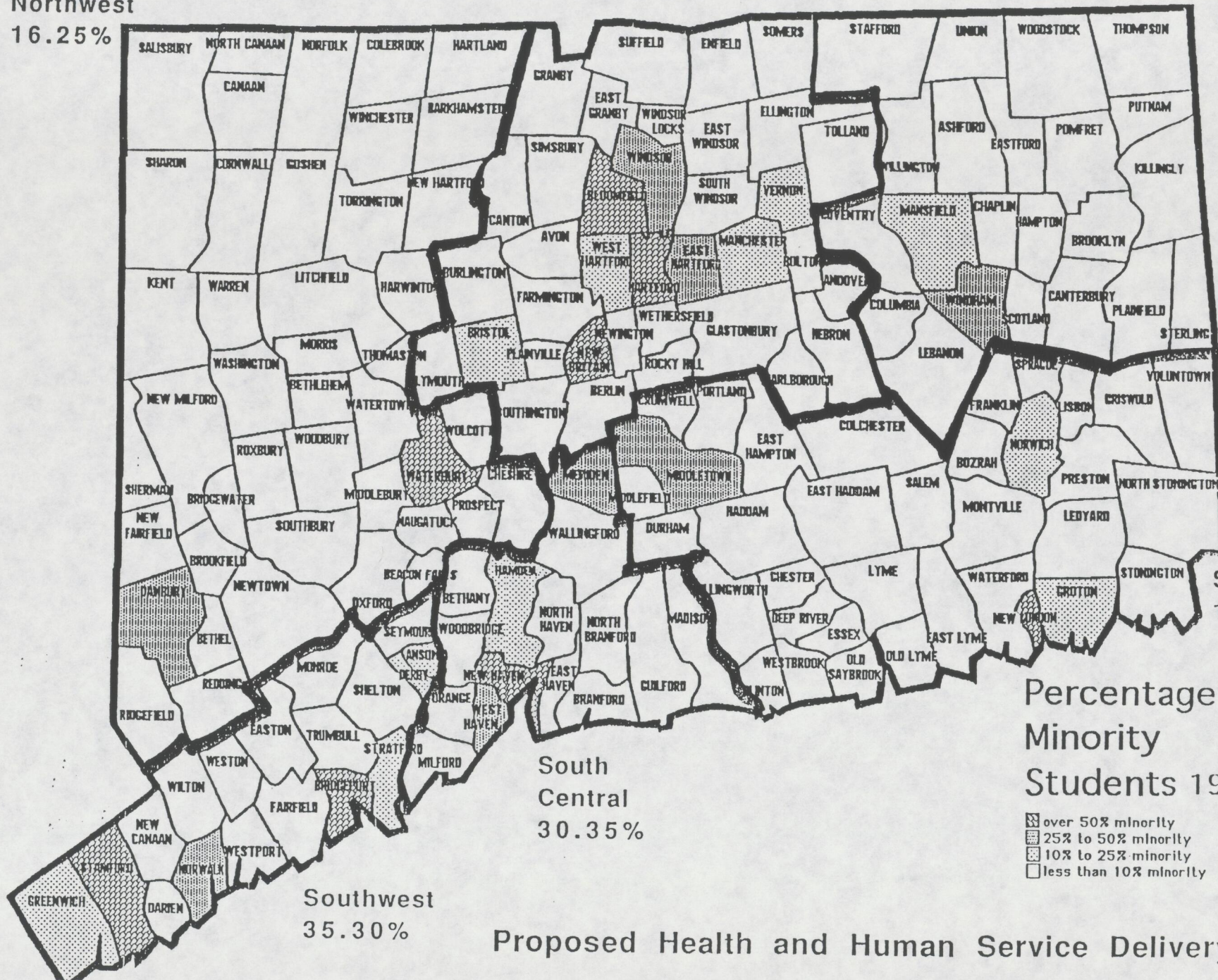
Governor Weicker, in concluding his speech, noted that Connecticut began addressing the issue of the equitable financing of public school education more than 20 years ago. Today, he said, the state faces yet another challenge.

"In the wake of the Horton vs. Meskill decision, we were able to adopt a fairer way of financing our schools," the Governor said. "Today, we can take the necessary second step to providing an equal educational experience by providing our students with a quality, integrated education. It would be a salutary achievement for government to do in 1993 by legislative and executive action what 20 years ago was left to a court."

Northwest
16.25%

NORTHCENTRAL 29.88%

Northeast
8.4%



Southeast
13.06%

Percentage
Minority
Students 1991

- over 50% minority
- 25% to 50% minority
- 10% to 25% minority
- less than 10% minority

South
Central
30.35%

Southwest
35.30%

Proposed Health and Human Service Delivery Areas