By PATRICK BONIN
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Elementary school children will be able to go to their neighborhood school if their neighborhood school is already desegregated, according to an East Baton Rouge Parish School Board policy approved Thursday.

Currently, some elementary schools are grouped in clusters and students who live within that area are assigned randomly to desegregate the clustered schools.

In some cases, under the current plan, students who live across the street from one school are bused across town to balance the race ratio of another school.

"I think it was a breakthrough to us doing something reasonable," said board member Jim Talbot. "It was the most logical and most reasonable thing that the School Board had done since I have been on it."

Before the vote, board attorney Bob Hammonds said he didn't have enough information for a recommendation to the board. However, changes in student assignments that affect desegregation generally have to be approved by U.S. District Judge John Parker.

The item was raised Thursday because the parents of 19 white Broadmoor Elementary school children had been assigned across town to Eden Park Elementary and 19 other white students had been assigned to replace them at Broadmoor.

Broadmoor parent Evan Pyle, whose son completed kindergarten in May and was assigned to Eden Park, was relieved with the board's vote.

"It's a Band-Aid," Pyle said. "I'm relieved by it. It can't possibly work, but I'm relieved by it. It doesn't do anything to solve any one problem, but it at least stops the immediate inequity of kids of the same race being bused into and out of the same school."

In another matter related to desegregation, board members discussed the racial imbalance of administration and teachers at 40 schools.

School system spokesman Bob Neese said the 1981 court order mandates that 65 percent of a school's administration be white. To be in compliance, Neese said the number may be plus or minus 10 percent of that figure.

Annette Mire, director of Human Resources for the system, said no teachers or administrators have been moved yet to meet the court-ordered mandate.

However, Mire said seniority lists at the schools involved have been made.

"We may in fact have to transfer some of those folks," Mire said.

The difficulty comes in moving too many teachers vital to a program at one school, she said.

"We don't want to go in and tear up instructional programs," she said. "That's not what we're all about."

Board member Ron Johnson said the fact that the schools are out of compliance makes the board in contempt of the court order.

"Here we are in 1991 with 40 schools out of racial balance as far as teachers and administration are concerned," Johnson said.

Johnson also was upset that board members voted not to go into executive session to discuss the situation.

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"I had hoped we'd be in compliance in five years," Johnson said. "We will never be in compliance as long as this stalling and what-not is involved."

In other action, the board unanimously approved a five-year strategic plan for the school system.

Rabbi Barry Weinstein, who worked on the planning team, was ecstatic with the vote.

"On such an important decision to have unanimity is a tremendous step," Weinstein said. "It breaks new ground for the future. I am very proud of our public schools. I know we have our difficulties. This plan is not a panacea, but it really sets the stage for the future."

Superintendent Bernard Weiss also was happy with the vote.

"I was delighted to see the support for the plan," Weiss said. "I think this is a blueprint for the future — one that can be adjusted and modified as it is reviewed."

The board approved of developing the plan in December 1989. The strategic planning team first met in March 1991 and finalized the goals for the system the following month. They are:

• To have 75 percent of the system's employees and the community feel positively about the system by 1992.
• To implement a program in grades pre-kindergarten to 2 in every elementary school, to ensure all third-graders have the skills to succeed and to slash the dropout rate in half by 1993.
• To make it impossible by 1993 "to identify school location by racial ratios, condition of facilities, curriculum offerings or experience/quality of faculty."
• Cut the failure rate in half and have 65 percent of students scoring at or above the national average on national standardized tests by 1995.

The planners have proposed 13 detailed strategies for attaining the goals, including making personnel policies driven by performance and improving communications both within the system and between the system and the community.

The planners also proposed that the system aggressively pursue alternative funding and put its current resources to better use, that students' social needs be addressed and that the system implement a process for monitoring compliance with the federal desegregation order of 1981.

A month ago, the board postponed its efforts to attain one of the planners' prime goals — additional funding for a major capital improvements plan. The board cannot take up that matter for almost six weeks unless it votes to waive its own rules of procedure.

The remaining aspects of the plan would cost $5.4 million, to be phased in over a five-year period beginning in the fall.


The money would pay for a new department of public affairs, some other positions and several new programs.

The board also approved the Pupil Progression Plan, a compilation of state and local policies that govern student placement in special programs and promotion, retention and grading policies.

The proposal also contains a provision that would curtail some actions used by the system's top achievers in middle and high school to inflate their grade point averages and class rankings.

In other business, the board voted to approve the retirement of Dr. Alvin F. Decuir, principal of Merrydale Elementary School, effective July 31. They also approved the retirement of Crestworth Middle School Principal Victor T. Baham Jr. effective June 29 and Gloria D. Chapman, assistant principal of instruction at Tara High School, effective June 28.

Principal Tim Cockerham, of Glen Oaks Middle School, received a sabbatical leave for rest and recuperation from Aug. 15, 1991, through May 28, 1992.