The latest idea for desegregating EBR public schools

Superintendent Gary Mathews wants the parish to split elementary schools into three general zones: majority-black, inner-city schools; majority-black schools in mostly white, central neighborhoods; and majority-white schools in the eastern part of the parish.

The eastern schools would be expanded, the central ones given magnet programs and the inner-city ones would end up with smaller classes as their students volunteer for schools in the other two zones. The schools that would benefit in each zone would be chosen from among those on this map.

Inner city schools
1. Delmont
2. North Highlands
3. Brookstown
4. Howell Park
5. Belfair
6. Greenville
7. Melrose
8. Bernard Terrace
9. Dufrocq
10. University Terrace

Central parish schools
11. Sharon Hills
12. Lanier
13. Westdale
14. Highland
15. Magnolia Woods

Eastern white schools
16. Tanglewood
17. Bellingrath Hills
18. Riveroaks
19. Wedgwood
20. Cedarcrest
21. Parkview
22. Shenandoah

Expert says new plan for schools legal

By KRISTEN KING

A concept Superintendent Gary Mathews is promoting to end the 43-year-old school desegregation case is similar to plans approved in other states, one of the nation's leading desegregation experts said.

But whether such a concept can be put into practice in Baton Rouge is another matter, said the expert, Boston University Professor Christine Rossell, who helped develop the existing desegregation plan in Baton Rouge in 1996.

The plaintiffs in the desegregation case already are questioning whether the concept is legal or equitable and whether the district even needs yet another desegregation plan.

The concept Mathews is promoting is relatively new, and has not been fleshed out with any details yet.

But Mathews said it is the system's "only and best" chance for further desegregation. He said ending court supervision is the
School

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three mornings and 4- and 5-year-olds four mornings.

Cost is $75 a month for the youngest children, $85 for the middle children and $100 for the oldest children.

Parents — moms and dads — are required to serve on the school's board and committees and to attend workdays for cleanup and repairs.

"There's a parent in the classroom every day to assist the teacher," Dillemuth said. "We have a lot of involvement from mothers, fathers and grandparents. Sometimes, a parent has to take vacation or annual leave.

"Fifty-three percent of our parents both work," Dillemuth said. "Or they're students. Our parents do a lot of juggling to be in the program."

A parent spends the morning in the classroom, then stays to clean up for the next day.

"In education, everyone has a different opinion, but everyone agrees on the importance of parental involvement," Dillemuth said.

Christopher Grenier, an ophthalmologist, and Andrea used to "fight over who was going to school and who was staying with the baby," Andrea laughed. "Sometimes, we'd both go."

The school was at the Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge on Goodwood Boulevard for 25 years. Displaced by renovation at the church, the school moved last September to St. Paul Lutheran, at the corner of Old Hammond Highway and Tara Boulevard.

Community Cooperative Nursery School is at a crossroads.

"Our future location is in doubt," Dillemuth said. "We need more space to enroll more children."

These may be scary times for "The Co-op," but response to the school's first major fund-raiser in 26 years, set for March 6, has been gratifying, Dillemuth said.

Co-op to hold benefit dinner

Community Cooperative Nursery School is holding a dinner, dance and auction to benefit the school.

Tickets are $25 a person. The event will be held from 6:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. March 6 at Boudreaux's, 2647 Government St.

For more information about the school or the fundraiser, call 928-7646.

About 100 underwriters and contributors to a silent auction and a live auction have put up such things as dinner at the Governor's Mansion, beach vacation, gourmet meals, a plane ride over Baton Rouge, symphony and theater tickets, jewelry, watches, clocks, art, photography, pottery, gardening supplies, books, home design consultation, and legal and medical services.

Advocate staff photo by John H. Williams

Paula Dillemuth is one of the Community Cooperative Nursery School's founders.

The names of contributors to an auction and auction underwriters fill three columns on a fund-raiser flyer. The event includes dinner and a dance.

Tickets are $25 per person. The event will be held from 6:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. at Boudreaux's, 2647 Government St.

In 1973, Dillemuth and some other parents were looking for a preschool that had a good pupil-teacher ratio and wasn't run by a church.

Though indebted to two churches for roof and walls, the school pays rent and runs the show in its classrooms.

"We don't emphasize social, emotional, physical or cognitive over one another," said Dillemuth. "There's equal emphasis on all four. Our children get a good feeling about education."

"The Co-op" has three teachers, none of whom receive benefits from the school, Dillemuth said.

"Our teachers have a one-year contract salary with a 6 percent raise each year," Dillemuth said.

"You hear (elementary) teachers say, 'I like Co-op children,'" Grenier said.

Some teachers like Co-op children in their classes because they know the parents will want to work at the school, she said.

Other teachers may be put off at first, Grenier said, when a former Co-op parent asks, "May I help in the classroom?" but most appreciate the interest.

Grenier helps monitor a reading program at son Thomas' elementary school. She helps her son's classmates work on computers.

Grenier has pitched in in French class and helped in fifth-grade science. A former high school physics teacher in New Orleans, Grenier grew up in Baton Rouge.

Dillemuth moved to Baton Rouge from Monroe with her family when she was 7.

Without the ideas, work and money of the late Jane Herrin, a member of the Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge in the early 1970s, "The Co-op" might never have been.

Dillemuth met Herrin while looking for a preschool for her children.

"Why don't you start a cooperative?" suggested Herrin.

Herrin, then in her 40s, with a degree in early childhood education from Purdue University, had taught in a cooperative in Atlanta.

"She put a lot of her money into it," Dillemuth said. "It was always, 'Pay me back when you can,' but we owed her money when she died."

"The Co-op" needs a permanent home and a good fund-raiser, Dillemuth said. So far, the best fund-raisers, mainly garage sales, have raised about $3,500, she said.

"I'd expect we could do at least $10,000 with the auction," she said.

Dinner, dance and auction are as much a celebration as a fund-raiser to longtime supporters of the school.

Dillemuth sees "The Co-op" as not just a place that helped launch her own children and hundreds of other children but as a model for Baton Rouge. Many of the people who will attend the fund-raiser have no direct connection to the school.

"Why do people who don't have cancer go to a cancer society auction?" Dillemuth said. "It's a cause."