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Champaign Unit 4 adopts desegregation plan in hopes of winning MSAP grant

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The Champaign Unit 4 school district passed the resolution to adopt the desegregation plan. They hope their efforts toward desegregation will increase their chances of winning the Magnet Schools Assistance Program, or MSAP, grant from the U.S. government for the 2010-2011 and 2012-2013 school years.

If the district wins the award, they will receive \$2.5 million each year for three years to support the implementation of magnet programs in three of the district's elementary schools: Booker T. Washington Elementary, Garden Hills Elementary and Stratton Elementary.

"The resolution affirms commitment to what we're already doing," said Beth Shepperd, Champaign Unit 4 assistant superintendent.

MSAP grants aim to help schools with voluntary desegregation efforts to eliminate, reduce and prevent the isolation of minority groups in educational programs while enabling them to meet challenging academic content and student academic achievement standards.

As part of its previous desegregation efforts, Champaign Unit 4 adopted a Consent Decree outlining educational equity in January 2002, which expired at the end of the 2008-2009 school year. Key points in the Consent Decree included racial fairness, parental choice and increased capacity in schools, a parent information center and community involvement.

"We will continue our commitment to educational equity and fairness in the district, and we will continue to hold the superintendent and his staff accountable for implementing the board's policies," said David Tomlinson, school board president.

Under the voluntary desegregation plan, Champaign Unit 4 will consider socioeconomic factors, such as gross family income, when assigning students to schools. The school district has also created the Educational Equity Excellence Committee to oversee efforts in promoting equal education opportunities.

The three elementary schools will have magnet programs installed in their existing educational systems.

Booker T. Washington Elementary School's magnet program will adopt a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) theme while Stratton Elementary School's magnet program will adopt a MicroSociety-esque theme. Garden Hills Elementary will implement the Primary Years Programme, an International Baccalaureate program for primary grades.

"Our staff, our board and our community have shown their commitment to the goals of the Consent Decree, and we will not be turning the clock back and losing the lessons that we have learned in the past seven years," said Arthur Culver, superintendent of Champaign Unit 4. "We will definitely continue the policies, practices, systems and programs and the processes that have led to where we are today."

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