

LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Wednesday, December 13, 2006
Jonas Clarke Middle School Auditorium
17 Stedman Road

Present: Superintendent Paul Ash, School Committee Chair Tom Diaz, School Committee Members: Helen Cohen, Tom Griffiths, Olga Gutttag and Ravi Sakhuja. Minutes taken by Leora Tec.

Public Hearing on Redistricting

I. Call to Order and Welcome (Tom Diaz)

II. Public Comment on redistricting

Paul Ash discussed the hundreds of emails that have been received about redistricting and expressed his appreciation of the thought that went into them. He described the process that the redistricting committee undertook and the importance of public input. He explained why redistricting is necessary now: some schools are over capacity and some are under capacity. He explained why we can't wait until the master plan is implemented.

Marlene Stone (PTSA co-president at LHS) made a statement on behalf of all the PTA presidents in Lexington stating that they form one vibrant school community and they appreciate the hard work of the redistricting committee. She said the PTA of each school is working on plans for incorporating the new families into their schools to make the transitions as smooth as possible.

Olga Gutttag presented common themes and concerns received by the redistricting committee and she and Paul Ash addressed them.

1. When do you expect to redistrict next?
You wait as long as possible. If we close an elementary school we would have to redistrict again.
2. What about bubble class sizes?
They are not connected to redistricting. This is a budget issue.
3. What are the School Committees preferred class sizes?
K: 18; 1-2: 22; 3-5: 24
4. Having a small group of kids switch middle schools is not a good idea.
5. How many elementary teachers do you expect to have after redistricting, and will they also be moved?
The number of teachers is a function of the budget. There is a process in the collective bargaining contract that determines how to move teachers.
6. What will the process be for requesting out-of neighborhood placements?
There will be a fair and equitable process.

7. What will the schools do to ease the transition for redistricted children?
 - a. When will families know for sure?

After School Committee takes a vote families will be notified.
 - b. How will important information about my child get communicated to the receiving school?

The principals have already begun discussion on this topic. There will be a plan in place.
 - c. Will students be in the classroom with others from their schools?

They will be placed as they are now. Many factors are taken into account.
 - d. Can I have my child placed in the class of a friend in the receiving school?

Communicate your child's needs to the principal.

Other questions were presented to which there are no answers yet.

Susanne Shavelson (John Poulter Rd): Our neighborhood is being redistricted out of our elementary school and out of our middle school to which we can walk. Forty-eight out of fifty families support the alternative proposal that we have submitted to you. Our proposal reduces the number of children changing middle schools from 70 to 0. It does not propose redistricting anyone else instead of us. Clarke is a half a mile from our neighborhood. We propose keeping the Fiske children at Fiske and moving the Bridge children to Harrington.

Peg Carlson (Blossomcrest Road/Allen Street): We are one neighborhood. The current proposal bifurcates our neighborhood. We are part of the Bridge neighborhood. The path at the end of Blossomcrest is something I never even knew about until 2 weeks ago; it cuts through the wetlands. Currently only four out of 22 children are bused to school. If moved to Bowman they will all have to be bused. We were told that we had to offer up an alternative proposal.

Annie McQuilken (daughter at Fiske through open enrollment): I have a proposal. I have a concern that we are creating an economic ghetto with Avalon Bay. We have kids moving in and out of some schools. The plan is somewhat piecemeal. It would be easier if the kids were moving in a block. I propose to move a neighborhood in east Lexington from Bowman to Harrington so you can leave Avalon Bay in the Bowman district. The second part of my proposal is to move the neighborhood bordered by Hancock, North Hancock and Bedford Street to Fiske and move the Reed Street neighborhood from Hastings to Estabrook. This way both those neighborhoods can go to schools closer to them. Also move Bridge kids to Bowman. Harrington and Fiske would have no kids leaving and no kids would switch middle schools.

Jill Singer (Vine Street): We live in the Harrington district but attend Fiske. I have concerns about out of neighborhood placement. I recommend that 5th graders be grandfathered into their middle schools.

Shao Pen Gong: My children go to Bridge. Bridge looks most crowded in the upper grades. Perhaps you can affect only incoming families and not families that are in school now.

Stu Jacobson: I have a 4th grader at Bridge. I agree that the middle schools should stay set.

Eileen Reynolds: We are 4 families on Mass. Ave across from Percy Rd in the narrow strip of land that has been redistricted from Bowman to Harrington. On a large map it makes sense to put us in Harrington but the bike path is a strong geographic barrier. We'd like to stay at Bowman.

Jerry Harris: We don't want to be taken from Hastings. The kids walk to Hastings but I don't think they will be able to Fiske. Also if Hastings will close in 4 years why make the kids be redistricted twice?

Jamie Katz: I transferred to 3 elementary schools in Lexington. I live in Five Fields. We were singled out by Blossomcrest. What are the standards for review? We can't just trade one neighborhood for another. You should look for a clear and compelling rationale or something that you overlooked.

Chris Hess (Treasurer of Five Fields): Thank you to Blossomcrest for saying they thought they had no choice. We heard you. There are only 13 Five Fields children going to Bridge next year and three are 4th graders.

Jerry Malkasian: Middle School kids walking home is important for social development so the proposal that reduces busing middle school kids is important.

Eric Zaina (?): I concur with letting nature run its course. I don't hear the clear mandate for change. Bridge has a capacity to expand. Let the demographics run out a bit.

Jessie Steigerwald: It would be helpful to hear what the guiding principles are. We'd like to know at Hastings what the long range plans are. Think about the implications of economic diversity when redistricting. In some places they grandfather whole families. It would've been better to have had a letter home; we've had no formal communication about Hastings' potentially closing.

Priscilla Dwyer: My kids go to Fiske but we live in the Estabrook district. Can the whole family get grandfathered in? Maybe if you asked the out of district families if they'd like to stay where they are the numbers would balance out.

Kamala Raj: We want to remain with family and friends in Fiske and Diamond. We don't want to go from Countryside to Clarke, which will take 30 minutes in the morning. It's not fair.

Maya Strod (Fiske student): 160 kids will be upset because they have to change schools and their best friends are also going to be upset, so 320 kids will be upset. And maybe triple that because they have more friends. Maybe make it a little smaller. Some of the kids aren't so happy about moving to a different school.

Olga Gutttag mentioned voluntary redistricting working in another country. Would people want to move to Fiske because it is new, air conditioned and would have smaller class sizes? Tom Griffiths disagreed with the voluntary approach.

Motion to adjourn (Cohen, Gutttag). The motion passed 5-0.