

**LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**Wednesday, January 17, 2007**  
**Jonas Clarke Middle School Auditorium**  
**17 Stedman Road**

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

**The meeting was convened at 7:15 p.m.**

**Public Hearing on Redistricting**

**Tom Diaz:** Welcome.

**Paul Ash:** Children in non-neighborhood elementary schools can't be grandfathered because it will result in large class sizes, but I will modify the administration process. We should keep the same threshold number for acceptance: 2 fewer children. For students already in school the criterion is at class size, so, for example, the 4<sup>th</sup> grade level would be 24. We are balancing between continuity and resources. There is a higher chance of staying through grade 5, so only if the class is one above would the child be denied. This process is an attempt to balance multiple interests. We will do what we can to keep the child in school once they have been accepted into the school.

Paul Ash gave overview of the redistricting process to date.

**Tom Griffiths:** We did have to move kids from middle schools.

**Rob McNeill:** What are the actual projected class sizes for each of the grades and each of the schools? Bridge is a fairly old school, rooms are fairly small. Please make sure you look at physical space.

**Paul Ash:** Class size—we have large classes at Bridge because we don't have enough teachers. We did get one extra teacher at Bridge. Systemwide we have 22 classes above the School Committee's preferred size. In my new budget I recommended an additional 3 teachers. In the budget book it shows each grade, each class size and projected class sizes for FY08. It will be close at Bridge to what we want. The budget I presented will require a sizable override. Redistricting does not resolve the class size issue. We had an architect come in to judge the optimal educational capacities of the schools. Classrooms are 900-1000 square feet today; older ones are 700 square feet. In new classes, coats are in the classroom. Over the next 3 years lockers will be installed in Bridge and the other schools in accordance with an agreement reached with the Fire Chief. The School Committee guideline is not adjusted on a per foot basis. If we go well above School Committee guidelines space can be a problem.

**Olga Guttag:** I have been pushing for Dr. Ash to adjust procedures in such a way so as to encourage parents to put kids in schools with lower class size. We need to work with parents to try to avoid bubble classes. Lexington works on a system of neighborhood schools, not magnet schools.

**Tom Griffiths:** Even with magnet schools you would have class size problems, because the system is operating at 94% of capacity. Requests for transfers won't make a dent unless requests for transfers are motivated solely by the desire to have children in smaller classes.

**Shao Penn Gao(?)** (redistricted from Bridge to Harrington): If parents want to stay, 4<sup>th</sup> graders can stay, so numbers will be too big. Let's say two schools would not take any new K students.....could you draw lines to not affect current students? Affect only incoming, not current students. Though I realize this would make kids on the same street go to different schools.

**Priscilla Dwyer:** Is there preference to kids already in the system?

**Paul Ash:** Yes. There will be two lotteries. The lotteries are on a per child per grade basis. First the lottery for kids in the school already will take place, then the one for the new applicants.

**Priscilla Dwyer:** Would there be incentive for out of district families to reassign children to districts that need kids when asking for volunteers?

**Paul Ash:** I want to stay open but this is a lot of change. Once we know the budget I can determine if there are bubble classes and then maybe we will have a conversation with people about voluntary moving.

**Priscilla Dwyer:** Avalon should go to Clarke.

**Olga Guttag:** If we are trying to solve the bubble class problem by moving an entire family we can create other problems. It's very complex.

**Tom Diaz:** Avalon is still pretty far from Clarke.

**Carol Riselli:** Proposal from her and her husband, Tom. Redistrict part of Bowman to Harrington rather than part of Bridge to Harrington.

**Olga Guttag:** We discussed your neighborhood; it was seriously considered. The gross overcapacity of Bridge is one of the main drivers of the redistricting, and your proposal doesn't address that.

**Tom Griffiths:** This wouldn't deal with Bridge being over 100%.

**Tricia McGlaughlin:** I live at Howard Munroe: We are at Harrington, we are not overcrowded, and we are moving Middle Schools. It is traumatic for my child. The 4<sup>th</sup> grade will be crowded next year; we are leaving a brand new school that is not full. There are small groups of people who are very much affected by this.

**Paul Ash** A child in a redistricted area needs to be treated no worse than a child who has applied to be there. There would be room to get up to 24, so [with current Harrington enrollment] there would need to be 6 extra students moving into 4<sup>th</sup> grade, before a transfer request would be denied. If there were not 7, your application would be accepted.

**Olga Gutttag:** I want to address the notion of a big neighborhood having more power than individual families. We worked hard to minimize pain and agony for everyone. We wanted to avoid changing middle schools but couldn't. If we have to move a group, let it be a well-defined neighborhood. There were really good reasons why the numbers worked.

**Donna Salusti ?** (Kendall Rd): Did you consider the South Sherbourne Loop, to be part of the community that is being redistricted?

**Paul Ash:** I didn't. We looked for a natural boundary. Worthen Rd. seemed to be a natural boundary. We don't really want to add more children to Harrington at this point.

**Steve Vincent:** (Sherbourne): How frequently will this happen? My family will be caught in it again if it does happen again. For instance if a school is removed from the system.

**Paul Ash:** Redistricting is a technical and an emotional problem. There is a compelling reason to do this now. If we close a school we would have a compelling reason again. But we don't know which school it would be, when it would be etc... The probability is that the same families won't get redistricted twice.

**Tom Diaz:** Historically we've been wary of entering this process.

**Olga Gutttag:** It is up to the community to hold future superintendents and School Committees to the standard that was kept in this process. A group from Estabrook is moving to Fiske to prevent redistricting twice.

**Joe Walsh** (384 Woburn): My kids are in the Fiske district now and are going to Harrington, it's hard to go to middle school without your friends.

**Paul Ash:** Concerning transfers between middle schools, a lot of thought has gone into it. Pam Houlares and Joanne Hennessy were not in favor of interdistrict placement. Also they were interested in building relationships between principals in elementary schools. There never was an absolute expectation that your children would go to Clarke, it was a hope.

**Joe Walsh:** It's a 5 minute walk to Harrington.

**Rob McNeill:** The 4th grade number for Bridge next year is 99 so there will be 4 or 5 teachers. Couldn't Bridge have a lot over capacity if many stayed? I hope we are not doing a half measure at Bridge.

**Paul Ash:** If there are 126 teachers next year or I have to cut teachers so you won't like the result at any school, that is a function of budget, not district lines. I've worked with an architect to determine capacity, have projected enrollment, and hope the numbers don't move too much.

**Rob McNeill:** Why didn't we take more kids out of Bridge?

**Tom Diaz:** Grandfathering is temporary.

**Tom Griffiths:** If Hastings were to close in the near future it is not good to move people in there. The one case where we did it was a technical adjustment.

**Ann Renauer** (?) (Bowman/Fiske): Moving people from the new Avalon to Fiske and Diamond what's the rationale? Was this a first choice, a last choice?

**Paul Ash:** We spent a lot of time discussing this. If Avalon were to be included in Bowman, Bowman is projected to have largest enrollment so we'd need to move 54 students out of Bowman, it creates a domino effect.

**Leora Tec** (Harrington parent): I am concerned about concentrating a lot of ELL students at Harrington by moving Captain Parker Arms there when Harrington already has Emerson Gardens. I am also concerned that the parents whose children are affected by this may not have been informed of the process and this hearing and may not feel entitled to speak.

**Paul Ash:** There are 19 children in Captain Parker Arms, 6 children receive ELL services. Moving 6 ELL students would not have a significant impact. We now have an ELL director and ELL teachers, Harrington School would maybe have more staffing and Bridge would maybe have less staffing. We did think about it.

**Tom Griffiths:** We didn't respond formally but I did speak to Leora. I told her among other things that we have large ELL populations in all the schools and, incidentally, that one of my business partners lives at Captain Parker Arms.

**Olga Gutttag:** A lot of people did not get responses because I was out of town. I will do my best to try to give answers. If you feel you have a specific question please resend it.

**Tom Diaz:** Our next meeting is Jan 30<sup>th</sup>, that gives us time to cogitate. This can be a discussion item on the 30<sup>th</sup>. We can vote in early February.

**Olga Gutttag:** If Paul Ash thinks this is the best recommendation we can vote on Jan 30<sup>th</sup> if we are ready.

**Tom Diaz:** If we are ready.

**Olga Gutttag:** We need to focus on the budget.

**Nameless Parent:** Are the schools holding for the welcome to kindergarten planning?

Discussion of the timing of the approval of redistricting.

**Motion to adjourn** (Griffiths, Gutttag). **The motion passed 4-0.**  
SC Meeting 1-17-07