



Lexington Public Schools

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Dear School Committee Members:

Given the recent public debate on possible Fiske School redistricting, I presented below my responses to typically asked questions. I hope my answers will help you think about the matter more clearly.

1. Why was Bridge School overcrowded for so many years before some of its students were redistricted to other schools?

Until the new Harrington and Fiske Schools opened in 2006 and 2007 respectively, there was not sufficient room in the other Schools to solve the overcrowded conditions at Bridge School.

In FY 07, the enrollment at Bridge School was 536, which was 70 students over capacity. The principal and parents complained that the school was seriously overcrowded. Consequently, the redistricting committee recommended that 71 students be redistricted to other Schools (primarily to Harrington). On October 1, 2007, (FY 08), Bridge School's enrollment was 489 students, down 47 students from the prior year.

2. Why is Fiske School now overcrowded when it was redistricted in September 2007?

After redistricting to Fiske School, the October 1, 2007, (FY 08) enrollment was 434 students, which was 56 students below the school's capacity. The next year, LPS offered full-day kindergarten in all K-5 schools. While we expected the change to full-day kindergarten would increase the FY 09 kindergarten enrollment by 14% (from 46 students to 52 students), the actual kindergarten enrollment on October 1, 2008, was 84 students, which was 32 students above the kindergarten projection. The extremely large kindergarten increase was unprecedented in Lexington for at least the last 28 years. Additionally, the total grade 1 through 5 enrollment increased by an additional 29 students, bringing the K-5 enrollment to 495 students. It is not known why the new Fiske School's enrollment increased well beyond historical trends. These two increases (K and grades 1-5) brought the School's enrollment over capacity by five students.

3. *Since Fiske School is just five students over capacity, what is the urgency to redistrict now?*

School capacity is defined as the total number of students yielded by multiplying the projected number of classes per grade times the recommended class size guidelines for each grade. For Fiske School, the architect, Design Partnership, set the capacity at 490 students. While this number is adequate if students are evenly distributed in each grade, often the distribution of students means additional classrooms are needed. For this reason, most architects recommend the enrollment be set at about 95% of the total capacity (for Fiske, that is 466).

Based on a 95% capacity figure, Fiske School is 29 students over capacity. Consequently, this year's grade 2 classes are 24, 25, 25, 25, which is 3 students above the recommended class size guideline and 1 student above the maximum class size guideline. If there were an extra classroom and funds were available, the grade 2 classroom would have been split.

Next year, the student distribution is expected to get worse. I project that three grade levels will be over recommended guidelines – K (21 students), 3 (25 students), and 4 (25/26 students). By adding an additional teacher to the School (using the computer room as a classroom), the kindergarten class sizes can be lowered to 15 to 16 students.

Please note that the projected overcrowded conditions are not based on mathematical progression rates. Rather, the projected number of students is based on the actual Kindergarten registration and the actual number of students currently enrolled.

4. *How do I know that Bridge won't be overcrowded in the near future if Avalon students are redistricted to Bridge School?*

This year, Bridge School is using 22 of its 23 available classrooms. Next year, the school's enrollment is projected to decline by 51 students (471 to 420). The difference between the outgoing grade 5 class (108 students) and incoming Kindergarten (53 known students) is 55, which explains the entire projected decline. The following year, 87 students will graduate and 42 students are expected to enter Kindergarten (a further decline of 45 students).

Another way of looking at the projected decline, without using any projections, is to compare the number of students in grades 3 through 5 (282 students) with the number of K through 2 (189 students). The K-2 population is 91 students lower, which is 150% of the entire K-5 Avalon population. Therefore, without relying on a further decline in the Bridge enrollment, there is sufficient space for all Avalon students using only 20 of the 23 classrooms.

5. *How do I know the enrollment projections are accurate? Might the problem go away if we wait?*

Enrollment projections are forecasts based on known census and school numbers that are adjusted for historical in- and out-migration. The method, also known as the "cohort survival method," is reliable when there are not fundamental changes in trends. Since one cannot accurately predict long-term changes in the economy, housing prices, and some other factors, I have learned to rely on one-year projections, particularly when the kindergarten enrollment process has already been completed.

Regarding the Bridge enrollment forecast, I am confident that the school's enrollment will significantly decline since the grade 3-5 enrollment is 91 greater than the grade K-2 enrollment. In addition, pre-Kindergarten (birth to age 4) census numbers have declined from numbers only a few years ago. At Fiske, while I predict the enrollment will increase by 42 students during the next four years, even level enrollment leaves the school without sufficient space.

6. *Why not wait another year for more data?*

While waiting a year will yield more accurate data for FY 10 and beyond, waiting will mean Fiske will lose its computer room and remain overcrowded next year.

7. *Should we set up a town-wide study committee to develop policies and procedures on redistricting before any school is redistricted?*

I do not recommend we set up such a town-wide committee at this time. Creating such a committee would delay the decision to reduce Fiske overcrowding by a year. Deciding when to redistrict a school is really a matter of judgment and the consensus of the School Committee. While it may seem very attractive to establish a committee to develop guidelines and procedures, redistricting decisions are most often made based on particular facts that do not easily fit into a set of decision rules.

8. *Should we set up a town-wide committee to look at all schools for possible redistricting before Avalon students are redistricted?*

I am very concerned that establishing a town-wide committee to look at all schools for possible redistricting would be highly disruptive to all families and children in the entire town. While the committee is deliberating, every child (who is aware of the study committee) and every parent will worry that the committee may recommend their house will be redistricted. The anxiety and community disruption only makes sense if one really needs a town-wide plan (e.g., closing a school or opening schools with significant extra space). In the current situation, only one school is overcrowded and the school directly south has enough space. The other four K-5 schools do not have sufficient space to help Fiske reduce its overcrowded conditions. For these reasons, I do not recommend we establish a town-wide committee.

**Option 3 - FY10 K Only to Bridge; FY11 through FY13 - All
Avalon Students Redistricted to Bridge**

Actual FY09 Enrollment (4/16/09)

FY10 through FY13 Projections

Bridge	<u>FY09</u>	<u>FY10</u>	<u>FY11</u>	<u>FY12</u>	<u>FY13</u>
K	55	66	53	55	51
1	68	56	69	55	57
2	66	72	71	72	57
3	88	65	91	74	75
4	86	87	73	92	75
5	108	87	96	74	94
TOTAL	471	433	453	422	409

Fiske	<u>FY09</u>	<u>FY10</u>	<u>FY11</u>	<u>FY12</u>	<u>FY13</u>
K	84	49	77	85	88
1	68	85	51	80	88
2	99	73	75	53	83
3	74	100	60	78	55
4	91	76	94	61	79
5	79	92	71	96	62
TOTAL	495	475	428	453	455

CLASSROOM NEEDS

Bridge	<u>FY09</u>	<u>FY10</u>	<u>FY11</u>	<u>FY12</u>	<u>FY13</u>
K	3	4	3	3	3
1	3	3	3	3	3
2	3	3	3	3	3
3	4	3	4	4	3
4	4	4	3	4	3
5	5	4	4	3	4
TOTAL	22	21	20	20	19

Fiske	<u>FY09</u>	<u>FY10</u>	<u>FY11</u>	<u>FY12</u>	<u>FY13</u>
K	4	3	4	5	5
1	3	4	3	4	4
2	4	4	3	3	4
3	4	4	3	3	3
4	4	3	4	3	3
5	3	4	3	4	3
Special	3	3	3	3	3
TOTAL	25	25	23	25	25

⁽¹⁾ Requires use of art, music or computer room as regular classroom