

CMS 2010-11 School Assignment Options Myers Park / East Meck / Harding Community Input Meeting

Harding University High School
October 22, 2009
6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Purpose: to involve parents & community in the development of new school boundaries

Discussion: student assignment options for overcrowding relief at Myers Park High and enrollment increase at East Mecklenburg High.

Attendance: approximately 250 parents, school personnel and community members

Alicisa Johnson, principal of Harding University High welcomed parents, community and staff to the meeting. She introduced CMS staff members present and Harding the SLT & PTSA. She then turned the meeting over to Scott McCully, executive director of planning and student placement. Mr. McCully expressed thanks to Harding University High for hosting the meeting and to the staff for their assistance in setup.

CMS staff present included:

- Molly Griffin, school board chairperson, District 5
- Rev. Tom Tate, school board member, District 4
- Dennis LaCaria, planning specialist, Planning and Project Management
- Dr. Elva Cooper, area superintendent, West Learning Community
- Charity Bell, executive director, West Learning Community
- Dr. Jeff Linker, director of magnet schools
- Cynthia Robbins Shah-Khan, media relations supervisor, Communications Dept.

Upon arrival, participants received a packet of information detailing the three revised discussion options created by the Planning Services Department and an individual input worksheet to be submitted at the conclusion of the meeting. Participants were also given the opportunity to provide their email address if they wish to be included on a distribution list for assignment update emails.

On August 11, 2009, in conjunction with the adoption of the boundary for the new high school built in Mint Hill, the School Board requested that the Planning Department look into the possibility of increasing the number of students assigned to East Mecklenburg and decreasing the number of students assigned to Myers Park High. Tonight, CMS staff will introduce three revised discussions options. The three revised options were created as a result of numerous phone calls and emails and from input received from participants who attended the previous community input meetings. The options may be viewed on the CMS website at http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/cmsdepartments/StudentPlacement/PlanningServices/Documents/East%20Meck_Myers%20Park%20description%20REV20091013.pdf

Staff is here to listen and record input from community members/parents and to answer/clarify any questions. Participants will have the opportunity to give suggestions and make comments to assist with the final recommendation. Tonight's meeting is the third meeting to discuss the overcrowding issue at Myers Park High School. The first meeting was held on October 1st; the second was held on October 6th.

The student assignment process timeline is as follows: public engagement meetings will be held in September and October. The staff recommendations will be presented in a report to the School Board on October 27th. A public hearing and Board vote will take place on November 10th. The student assignment lottery process begins in January.

After presentation from staff, participants were given 30 minutes to look over and discuss the options in small groups at their tables and to report back to attendees which option they preferred or what solution they would recommend. Staff was available to answer questions and address concerns. Comments and questions from small groups are recorded below:

COMMENTS:

1 – (table had both Myers Park & Harding parents) Myers Park is in support of the STEM option at East Meck but is not in support of any other option. Harding does not support STEM option. This would reduce the population at Harding and change the county-wide magnet status of the school.

2 – East Meck supports the option of adding the STEM program to our school. However, don't reduce Harding's enrollment to accomplish this. Reassignment should come from the school with the largest population, which is Myers Park. We ask that you revisit shifting the Myers Park / East Meck boundary.

3 – Harding wants to retain its county-wide magnet status. Don't take student from an under capacity school to populate East Meck. The south side bus routes would be too long. Remove Harding completely from the options being considered.

4 – The original options were concerning relief to Myers Park. Changing Harding does not help Myers Park. Why is Harding being brought into this process and why are we just now being notified?

5 – The 147 Harding student & parents who live in the blue zone have a lot invested in the school. We love it here and want to stay.

6 – Harding is not interested in any of the options presented. Don't involve Harding in this process. Leave Harding a county-wide magnet.

7 – Why was Harding put into the options? This is so quick. Is there going to be another meeting? What research was done indicating to you that Harding is not doing a good job? Give us time to build our program here; don't change it.

8 – Myers Park & Harding parents at this table do not support moving any students from Harding. Fourteen million dollars has been invested in this building for the math and science

program. Don't kill the program by taking our students away. If you take our students, we will lose money, resources and teachers. How can CMS support 2 math/science programs? We ask that you leave Harding alone. We suggest that you reassign Myers Park non-magnet students to relieve the overcrowding.

9 – This group of Harding parents wants to understand why the magnet program and county-wide magnet status is being taken away from Harding. We ask that you remove Harding from your options.

10 – We do not support the STEM option. We know that have been asked to relieve overcrowding at Myers Park, but leave Harding alone. IB students could be sent from Myers Park to Harding. We will gladly take them. Maybe look at other schools as options for Myers Park relief, but leave Harding as it is.

11 – We cannot support options that take away transportation or county-wide magnet status. Harding is preparing students for the future. Please don't change it.

12 – A Harding father, who is a teacher at McClintock, stated that the students and parents really love their school. We feel the same about our school as the Myers Park parents feel about theirs....don't move our students.

13 – Harding is fine the way it is. Why would you bother it? These are not options for our students. Students cannot stay without transportation.

14 – We are not in favor of changing anything at Harding. The programs are working very well. Why does East Meck need more students? What would happen to the staff at Harding if students leave?

15 – We do not support any of the options being presented. We ask that you go back to the original boundary change option for East Meck/Myers Park. Why do you want to add a STEM program to another school when we are not full? Help us work to make Harding's current program stronger. Harding may have 2 programs but we are 1 school – a family.

16 – Every Harding student is here because they chose to come to this school. Parents support the school. Why is Harding being upset because other parents at other school are unhappy?

17 – Harding is not pleased with the options presented. Myers Park is overcrowded; East Meck has room; that's your option. Have you considered how changes affect the students in both academics and extra-curricular activities? Our students have worked hard and earned the right to be here.

18 – Option A would be ok with us. Let Harding grow a little, but don't take our STEM away. Why do you need an IB program at a school that retains 96% of its home school population? Go back to your original plan to relieve Myers Park. Leave Harding as it is.

19 – STEM parents are very pleased with the program. Taking it away should not be an option. If you add to Harding's IB program, will it lessen the quality of teaching in our program – more students in each classroom? Myers Park and East Meck are close to each other. Considering transportation cost, wouldn't a boundary change between those two schools be a more reasonable

solution? If you want a STEM program at East Meck, begin it with the 9th grade class. Don't take existing students from Harding.

20 – Looking at the options from a student's perspective, I see more negatives than positives in the option. I ask that you not split up the Harding students.

21 – East Meck lost 700 students because of a new school boundary. We will now be under-populated. We would like to have a STEM program, but not at the expense of the Harding STEM program. Let East Meck remain a partial IB magnet and add STEM, allowing those 700 students lost to the new boundary the first option to attend East Meck STEM. The School Board should look at how students are being hurt.

22 – With transportation not being offered, this is forced segregation. Harding is doing well. Don't change it.

23 – The schools that are suffering because of all of this are the one that should not be. East Meck needs students, but not at the expense of Harding. There has to be a better way to open a STEM program at East Meck to help the population. Too many options were removed without community input. Go back to the original problem between Myers Park and East Meck.

24 – Harding is a family that sticks together. There is a group of IB and Math/Science students here tonight. I have been in the band for 3 years. Don't hurt the Harding students.

25 – We are opposed to option A. Harding needs to keep its county-wide magnet status. Our students need to stay with transportation. Could current students be grandfathered? Please leave Harding as it is.

26 – It is ridiculous to mess with any magnet program that is working. Don't mess with Harding or Myers Park magnet programs. Overcrowding is a boundary issue, not a magnet issue.

27 – You have presented 3 options without any true input from Harding. Give us the same consideration that you have given other schools. This is not fair to Harding.

QUESTIONS:

1 – Will the IB students in the blue transportation zone be forced to attend East Meck?
Those students would have the option to remain at Harding, but no transportation would be provided.

2 – How would changes affect athletics?
In the initial year, those students affected by the Board decision would remain eligible to play sports at their assigned school. Students who are assigned to a school by parent choice would have to sit out 365 days.

3 – Why is the timing of this meeting so close to the staff recommendation date?
Options were present to the Board a couple of weeks ago. The option to start a STEM program at East Meck came out of previous community input. To help make it work, we would need to incorporate the Math/Science magnet program at East Meck. This meeting

is so that we can get input/feedback from Harding. Information from tonight's meeting will be shared with the superintendent tomorrow.

4 – Why not look at other schools for relieving Myers Park?

There are other programs that East Meck could consider along with the STEM program. But Harding was the best option, and Harding program will re-grow.

5 – How will you staff Harding if extra IB students come here?

There is a staffing allocation formula. If you gain students, you gain teachers. If you lose students, you lose teachers.

6 – Why would transportation be taken away from students who choose to stay at Harding?

As of this past year, the School Board voted to remove transportation eligibility from all grandfathered students. This option for Harding remains consistent with what has happened with other schools/programs.

7 – If two siblings are attending Harding, one in IB, one in Math/Science, would the Math/Science student be allowed to remain with their sibling?

The Math/Science student could be assigned to Harding through participation in the lottery or board transfer.

8 – Why are you considering taking students from Harding?

Math/Science is an important part of STEM.

9 – What is the economic impact on Harding with this option?

There is no way to answer that. We would hope that more students will come to replace those leaving.

10 – What about the financial implications? Why take children away from the capital investment made here at Harding?

CMS has ongoing building programs that upgrade all schools.

11 – Isn't taking away transportation forced segregation?

The option affects students of all races and socio-economic classes. It singles out no one.

12 – Would there be any exceptions for transportation?

No. We could look into the possibility of city bus passes for students.

13 – Why is the boundary change off the table?

The Sept. 22nd board report had an option with a boundary change. Dr. Gorman asked the Board for their interest in this option. The Board provided input that they were not interested in pursuing a boundary change.

14 – Why can't CMS create and implement enrollment caps at each school? Others coming after a school is full would have to choose another school.

Caps directly conflict with the Board's guiding principles. The Board has established that all students have a home school guarantee.

15 – Will Rama Road and McClintock STEM be county-wide?

No, it will be just for those students in the home school area.

16 – Will Myers Park IB teachers be moved to another IB school?

It depends on where they are needed. If the students remain in the IB program, teachers will be moved with the students. If not, they may be assigned to regular schools.

17 – How can you staff another STEM program? Harding has had problems getting qualified teachers.

Human Resources would have to address the question concerning staffing.

18 – Does the sibling guarantee apply to the IB program in option A?

Yes, the IB program remains county-wide.

19 – If Harding gets more IB students, will that outweigh the Math/Science students who move to East Meck?

Depending on how many students choose the programs, it could be a wash for Harding.

20 – Where did the meetings take place that brought Harding into the mix?

Not sure exactly where/when the comment was made. It may have even come through a comment card, email or community input.

21 – How does a comment turn into an option?

We carefully look at all comments, share them with the superintendent and go from there.

22 – When the Board meets, will they have already decided on which option they will choose?

The staff recommendation is presented to the Board. Then there are two weeks before the vote. During this time, the Board continues to listen to the public. Also, there is a public hearing before the vote.

Chuck Davis, Harding SLT President, concluded the meeting with these comments:

- We would like to acknowledge the Harding principal and administration here tonight. Thank you for supporting Harding.
- Harding is in its first year with entrance requirements. Give us a chance to succeed.
- Our county-wide Math/Science and IB program has open doors to accept other students.
- We support the option only if IB remains county-wide.
- Add more students at East Meck with a STEM program, not our Math/Science program.
- The only option we see for relieving Myers Park is re-drawing the boundary.