

CMS 2010-11 School Assignment Options Community Input Meeting

Myers Park High School
September 29, 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 Eastover Elementary

Attendance: approximately 280 parents, school personnel and community members

Scott McCully, executive director of planning and student placement, welcomed everyone to the meeting. Participants received a packet of information detailing the three 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.

Tonight CMS staff will present assignment discussion options and the reasoning behind the creation of those options. Staff is also here to listen and record input from community members and parents. Participants will have the opportunity to give suggestions and make comments to assist with the final decision. Tonight's meeting is the first of two to discuss the overcrowding issue at Eastover Elementary. The second meeting will be held on Thursday, October 8th, 6:30-8:30 p.m. at Myers Park High School. (The second meeting will be a duplicate of the first; it is not necessary to attend both.)

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 the Board vote will take place on November 10th. The student assignment lottery process begins in January.

Mr. McCully introduced the CMS staff present:

- Molly Griffin, school board chairperson, District 5
- Tom Tate, school board member, District 4
- Joel Ritchie, area superintendent, Central Learning Community
- Christine Hamlett, planning specialist, Planning Services Dept.
- Jennifer Holmes, planning specialist, Planning Services Dept.
- Dennis LaCaria, planning specialist, Planning and Project Management
- Jeff Linker, director of magnet schools
- Paul Bonner, principal, Myers Park Elementary School
- Bud Cesena, chief of CMS Police Department
- Cynthia Robbins, media relations specialist, Communications Dept.

The individual worksheet listed 9 criteria that CMS should consider when developing boundaries. The list was compiled from criteria that had been mentioned most often in previous boundary meetings. Mr. McCully asked participants to rank what they felt are the top 5 criteria – from 1 to 5 in order of importance.

Attention was then directed to the information packet prepared for the meeting. The packet includes the following information: 2009-10 20th day enrollment data, enrollment history, detailed information of the three assignment discussion options, map of the boundary change option, and demographic/student data.

Christine Hamlett, planning specialist, explained the boundary option map and demographic sheet. Scott McCully explained the 2 options that involve building swaps.

At this point, participants were given a few minutes to look over the options, decide which they prefer, and write any suggestions/comments they may have on the individual worksheet provided. Planning specialists will use these worksheets to look for a common thread from the input received and possibly create a community boundary option. After all input is analyzed and considered, one recommendation will be finalized to be presented to the School Board on October 27th. Throughout the process, up-to-date information can be found on the Planning Services Department website.

<http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/cmsdepartments/StudentPlacement/PlanningServices/Pages/Planning.aspx>

The remainder of the meeting was devoted to a question/answer period. Please see below...

Question: Is the student information on the boundary option dot map 2008-09 or 2009-10 data?

Answer: The dot map is based on 2009-10 student assignment data. We will correct the description in the map legend.

Question: Student assignment option 3 involves definite numbers. Where do you get the number of student in this option?

Answer: The number of students assigned to magnet programs is controlled. We know where students live and who attends the magnet programs. Enrollment projections can be derived using modeling/assumptions from this data.

Question: On the map, the Billingsville Elementary boundary is shown as touching the Eastover boundary. What is the feasibility of considering a building swap with Billingsville?

Answer: We would have to look at numbers. Certainly any school in the area could be considered.

Question: Explain capacity. According to the datasheet, Eastover is only a few students over capacity.

Answer: Building capacity is the ratio of students to teachers. The number of students in a classroom (1 teacher) times the number of classrooms in a building equals capacity. (classroom size varies by grade level) The number of teachers to classrooms equals building utilization. Eastover's enrollment history shows continued growth that must be addressed. The change in the cut-off date for kindergarten registration kept enrollment numbers down this year, but those children will begin kindergarten in 2010-11. This is something else we must plan for.

Question: Why do you show no kindergarten growth for Myers Park Traditional in 2010-11?

Answer: The number of students admitted to a magnet program can be controlled. If needed, entrance into kindergarten at MPT could be limited to siblings only.

Question: What constitutes a classroom?

Answer: There are education specifications for classrooms. There has to be a certain amount of square footage based on grade level.

Question: Describe the 26 classrooms at Eastover. Are all rooms considered classrooms?

Answer: All rooms are classrooms, but the auditorium is not counted as a classroom. A building's utilization fluctuates based on the number of students and teachers. Grade level fluctuations affect utilization percentages. Free/Reduced Lunch percentages affect the teacher/student ratio which affects capacity.

Question: How does academic achievement play into boundary options? When will you be able to share this data as a part of the demographic chart?

Answer: There is a process to go through to figure academic percentages. This is something we are working on and should be able to provide academic data in the near future, just as we provide Free/Reduced Lunch percentages, ethnicity, etc.

Question: Why have magnets been given preference over regular schools? In the Eastover area there are 2 traditional schools and 1 arts school.

Answer: If you look at the history of the attendance zone, this has been the case for some time. During the magnet review last year, the Board looked at locations of magnet schools, including the Eastover area. The School Board felt that magnet schools in this area should remain as they are.

Question: Is there data showing magnet students who live in the Eastover area?

Answer: Yes, we can provide that information on our website. Student dot maps are available online by attending school on the planning services webpage.

Question: There are lots of statics about the differences in Eastover and Myers Park Traditional. Is there a precedent to move one neighborhood from a high performing school to a low performing school? Do you consider discipline, safety, and other issues when creating new boundaries?

Answer: We do consider how boundary changes affect the student body. However, an important criterion considered is where we can provide space.

Question: Is a building utilization of 95% only going to provide relief to Eastover for one year?

Answer: It is possible that we may need to adjust the boundary option to give Eastover more relief.

Question: Why does the boundary option split First Ward Elementary between two middle schools: Alexander Graham and Bishop Spaugh?

Answer: As a general rule, we try to have elementary schools feed into one middle school, but sometimes that is not possible. We are open to looking at options with other attendance zones that touch the current boundary, but at this time we do not have recommendations to change any middle school attendance zones.

Question: The data provided omitted information about safety issues. Boundary changes should take into consideration how to keep kids safe.

Answer: The Planning Services Department is trying to use buildings in the best possible way. Mr. Joel Ritchie, area superintendent, may be able to give input on your safety concerns.

Comment from a First Ward Elementary teacher – for herself, she has no safety concerns at First Ward. The parent & staff surveys reflect that adults associated with the school feel safe at all times. First Ward experiences fewer lockdowns than many suburban schools.

Question: How many classrooms are there and what is the building utilization at Billingsville?

Answer: There are 32 teachers and 35 classrooms. Twentieth day enrollment is 517. Capacity is 603. Building utilization is 91% (32 teachers/35 classrooms).

Question: What is the capacity of Cotswold Elementary?

Answer: There are 33 teachers and 32 classrooms. Twentieth day enrollment is 588 students. Building capacity is 607 students. Cotswold is at 103% capacity (32/33 teachers).

Question: Can you provide the grade levels of students at Eastover who live outside of the homeschool attendance zone and when they will matriculate out?

Answer: Yes, we will post that information on our website.

Question: What kind of impact is there on a well diversified school when school assignments change?

Answer: There is always an impact. Presently, Myers Park Traditional Elementary pulls students from all over the county. Currently, it is 25% Free/Reduced Lunch. The true impact would not be known until the twentieth school day school reports are finalized.

Question: How can we get data to share so that options could be created to benefit everyone? Is there a long-term solution?

Answer: Submit your ideas in writing tonight. Draw maps, etc. Planning Services staff can compile the data based on your options.

Question: Do you know how many Eastover students live on Wendover Road in the area called Old Cotswold. This area has been assigned to Eastover for 40 years.

Answer: There are between 60-70 Eastover students in that area.

Question: What costs are involved in the facility swap between Dilworth & First Ward?

Answer: The old First Ward building would need to be demolished to make room for additional buses, but this is not an appreciable amount of construction costs. The demolition is a separate cost from the cost of the assignment change. The main cost would come from the move itself; textbooks, supplies, materials, etc.

Question: CMS has presented 3 unpopular options. Is it possible to delay the decision for one year so that the options can be studied further? Why does the decision have to be made now?

Answer: Eastover needs relief now. It cannot wait another year. We actually began looking at this area during the 2007-08 year. All of the home schools in the area are over populated. Magnets in the area are meant to attract students. We have worked on this issue for some time and purposely waited until the Board finished the magnet review before creating our 3 options for Eastover relief. This is the typical time of year to review boundaries. We are open to a variety of options to try to satisfy as many families as possible.

Question: What was the Board thinking when approving all of the magnets in this area?

Answer: The Board was looking at programmatic considerations of magnet schools.

Question: There is concern about feeder areas. Where is the new high school in this area going to be built, and how will it affect boundaries?

Answer: The relief for Myers Park High and West Charlotte High schools is the #1 high school project in the unfunded long range plan. It could possibly open by the 2015 or 2016 school year and will be located somewhere near Center City. There is no way we can know its impact on boundaries at this time.

Question: A group of citizens has been working through data that was provided. We would like to present the idea of creating a small attendance zone for Myer Park Traditional to provide relief to Eastover, but not overrun the magnet program (maybe 10-15% of the population at MPT).

Answer: This could be one option that we look into.

Question: If we are open to options that affect other schools, (i.e. Billingsville, Cotswold, etc.) is this something that can be done without more meetings involving parents from those schools?

Answer: We would have to work through the options and go from there.

Question: Why do you think if a facility swap is done, that those students within a 1/3 mile radius will want to stay at that school? Maybe a better option is to move the Performing Arts program to First Ward and have Dilworth and Eastover as neighborhood schools.

Answer: This could be an option, but would have to be looked into.

Question: Can you comment that the parent suggestions and work that we are putting into this is to relieve overcrowding and that there are no ulterior motives?

Answer: There are good schools in the area. We just need to adjust the number of students to relieve overcrowding. We are looking at a long term situation. All the data presented and work that we do is to that end. There is a fine line margin in balancing enrollments.

Question: Would resulting schools created by option #1 and option #2 be Title I schools? And if so, would students have the choice to transfer out?

Answer: The school created is projected option is to have approximately 57% Free Reduced Lunch. This is well below the 75% Title I threshold, therefore students would not have the choice to transfer out since it will no longer be a Title I school. We are projected the FRL levels, the exact FRL percentage are not known until the actual student assignments are made.

Question: In option #3, Myers Park Traditional would have capacity issues. Could we wait 2 years until all of the Kindergarten students are in school and possibly implement changes in stages?

Answer: A transition plan is sometimes possible. However, we need immediate relief for Eastover.

Question: If the relief for Eastover involves Dilworth, we wish to be moved to the First Ward facility. On Monday night, the PTA voted to endorse a move to First Ward. This would center the arts program in the uptown area. Dilworth residents would support a neighborhood school. We would also like a walk zone for the new arts program. This timeframe is difficult. Is it critical that this change happen next year?

Answer: We must solve the overcrowding at Eastover immediately.

Comment: Eastover and Myers Park Traditional parents both made the comment that they are on the same team. They all want the same thing – for their children to be able to continue to attend school with the classmates & friends that they are with now.