

Minutes of the
Flexible Boundary Committee Meeting
10 December 2009
L.J. Hauser Jr. High School

1. Call to Order/Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 7:11 p.m. The following individuals were in attendance:

Committee members*--

Jennifer Leimberer, Board of Education Member (Chair)
Mary T. Stimming, Board of Education Member
Jim Raffensperger, Ames representative
Karen Magee, Blythe Park representative
Greg Nessinger, Central representative
Trish Smithing, Hollywood representative (left meeting at 8:00 pm; childcare)

Participating Members of the Public --

Art Perry, Hollywood
Agnes Halmon, Hollywood

*As of this date, Hauser does not have an official representative. Members Stimming and Magee, however, are Hauser parents.

2. Public Comment/Statement

Mr. Perry asked whether this Committee's review of the Flexible Boundary Policy is part of a general process of policy review or an independent process. Mrs. Leimberer and Mrs. Stimming detailed salient background: Board's Spring 2009 update of its Policy Manual through IASB and on-going amending of select policies through Board actions (Autumn 2009-present). Review of FB Policy is part of this larger policy review process, but is also prompted by questions raised concerning how well FB Policy is meeting its stated goals.

3. Review and Approve Minutes

Following a conversation reiterating the parameters of the Committee's work, the Minutes of the 12 November 2009 meeting were approved with one amendment:

p. 2 third line from the bottom of final paragraph, replace "*group*" with "*Committee*"

Sentence now to read:

"Mrs. Leimberer indicated that she envisioned the Committee working by consensus.

4. Summary of Conversation from Last Meeting

Mrs. Leimberer asked everyone in attendance to record their tallies on the Feedback Page distributed at last month's meeting on a master posted for group display. This exercise is not a valid survey, but

is designed to generate more conversation and surface perceptions and existing points of agreement within the room.

Some patterns group observed:

Strong “Yes/Yes, but”:

- Improve Quality
- Assignment according to Registration Date
(group comment: “this is not in compliance with stated policy”)
- Remain in School once Assigned

Strong “Nos”:

- Safety (group concern was displacing children across First Avenue)
- Plan for the Future

Divided Opinion:

- Equity
- Maximize Use of Facilities
- Maintains Neighborhood School Model
- Assignments based on Siblings

Mrs. Magee noted the ‘flip’ in schools most affected by enrollment and boundary issues—in 2000-2002 it was Blythe and Central; now it is Ames and Hollywood. Group discussed how different schools’ experiences play into thinking about policy—for good and ill.

5. Review and Discuss the Origins of the FB Policy

Reasons to Revisit. There was a lively debate about the virtues of reviewing the Long Range Steering Committee’s document that lead to FB Policy currently in place. Ultimate consensus was that this document provides the background for the FB Policy; the research and data history behind it, the analysis of the situation within its larger district context, the full intentions of the Policy and assumptions guiding its design.

Other Options Considered. A question was raised about whether options other than FB were considered for achieving these ends (FB Policy mentions “other solutions”). Mrs. Magee recalled three solutions that were considered: adjusting school boundaries, creating grade level centers, adding .5 teachers to large classrooms. The LRSC does not mention these other possibilities. Question was also asked whether other strategies were considered (e.g., create 3-sections of grades at Central, 2-sections of some grades at Blythe). Mrs. Magee did not remember this being discussed; may have been.

Questions Raised. Mrs. Leimberer asked group members to post questions the LRSC document raised for them on a sheet on the wall. During group meetings, we will check to see if all questions are answered. The following are written questions posted about the LRSC document (grouped loosely by topic; not all questions were verbalized during the meeting):

- Did Administration and BOE share parent concerns?
- Did Administration and BOE have different concerns?
- What, other than perception of impact of comparative class size, is evidence of inequitable education across district? i.e, Test scores? Grades? Teacher reports?
- Did outlier classes (class of 12 and class of 29) drive the discussion?

- Can you have neighborhood schools without fixed boundaries?

- Need addresses for people not in school boundary in order to plot them on map to see how far people are from their neighborhood schools.
 - What is the Teacher Associate model?
 - Recommends class size of 15, but sets size at 20.
 - Effect of class size 17-22?
 - Is construction an option going forward (p. 2)?
 - Where did actual boundary map in current effect come from?
 - The LRSC recommended elimination of boundaries between Ames, Central, Blythe—what changed?
 - Were any solutions considered for reducing class sizes other than FB?
 - The LRSC Recommendations and the FB Policy have class size ranges—why is a cap being implemented? Why the change?
 - Areas of continued study mentioned on p. 14—what happened?
 - Do we agree with Assumptions outlined on p. 11? Any to add?
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- How was Blythe overcrowded then (189 students in building), but not now (197 students in building)?
 - How dedicated space for “specials” at Blythe now with more children in building, but not then?
 - Is 2002 when idea fixed that Blythe must be a 1-section school? Was this done so that art/music etc. be given dedicated space?
 - Hollywood was only represented by a preschool parent?
 - Why was it decided (p.12) that Hollywood boundary should remain unchanged?
 - Comparative numbers, then and now:

Elem. School	2002 Students in Bldg	2009 Students in Bldg	Number Change
Ames	185	334	+149
Blythe	189	197 (incl. ECE)	+8
Central	301	391	+90
Hollywood	111	119	+8
Hauser	376	476	+87

- How to balance one school hitting maximum but another school having excess capacity?
- How should we deal with greatly increasing enrollment where available classrooms don't allow for smaller numbers in class? i.e., 8 available rooms, but 250 kids?
- Have the school scores dropped since the FB plan has been instituted?
- Is space for Special Ed/Support Staff equal at all schools?
- Has there been a safety issue with Hollywood students going to Blythe (any accidents)?
- Large classes had ½ time teacher—still true?
- Walk through Ames and Central in 2001 and they had space—still true?
- Document lists 9 concerns, only deals with Group A; what about B and C (p. 6)?

Summary Discussion. A wide-ranging conversation ensued about the FB Policy, its origins, its implementation and effects. Out of this a number of points of unanimous agreement were reached:

- Under a FB Policy, the assignment of children is flexible, not the boundary lines. In reality they were redrawn and fixed.
- District 96 is committed to the neighborhood school model.
- Currently FB is affecting this (e.g., 20% of Blythe is not from own attendance area.)

- May only be a small percentage of students displaced (6% this year, 15% two years ago), but, at registration the potential implications of the Flexible Boundary policy affect 100% of Kindergarten students.
- Implementation of policy is problematic.
- Sibling at school is a top assignment factor (though have been exceptions).
- With high enrollment, date/time of registration have trumped just about all else in placement process.
- Great confusion exists among parents about the policy and its procedures.
- Committee will focus on current and future situation, policy and implementation.
- Not considered necessary at this time to invite members from LRSC or past Boards to discuss origins of policy.
- Members trust that others are not operating with hidden agendas. Mr. Raffensperger shared an alternate model he has thought about (“Flexible Boundary Zones” between Ames/Blythe/Central), but stressed he understands this may or may not become point of discussion. Others shared reasons for volunteering for committee, but made clear no particular agenda they are trying to achieve.

6. Data to be Gathered

Group interested in

- Map with displaced students plotted on it.
- All displacement reports since time FB instituted (will note the years displacement minimized due to Board decisions to raise class size).
- 30-Year Enrollment Data (soon to be available)

7. Next Meeting and Tasks

The next meeting of the FB Committee will be Thursday, 14 January 2010. Mrs. Leimberer will inquire about meeting in Ames multi-purpose room.

- Please reread the FB Policy and prepare for a line-by-line analysis with an eye towards evaluating it in terms of the original feedback page (NB, policy feedback page categories drawn from FB Policy’s own stated goals).
- Also, review the Draft Questions for Administrators.

8. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:58 p.m.

Mary T. Stimming, Recorder
Chair

Jennifer M. Leimberer, Committee