

BOARD OF EDUCATION
The School District of South Orange and Maplewood
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TO: Members, Board of Education
John Ramos, Superintendent

FROM: Cheryl Schneider, Business Administrator

SUBJECT: Enrollment and Redistricting Considerations

HISTORICAL REDISTRICTING CONSIDERATIONS

On average, every 10 or so years, we need to revisit attendance zones to address changes in the enrollment patterns in the two towns. A major redistricting of the elementary attendance zones was completed in 1998 when the Seth Boyden Demonstration program was created. At this time the Seth Boyden zone was dramatically reduced to allow space for families outside the Seth Boyden zone who chose to opt into the program. South Mountain and Tuscan zones were purposely created as large attendance zones with the expectation that students from these two zones would opt into the Seth Boyden program. In 2010, a “tweaking” of the elementary sending zone lines took place to accommodate changes in the Demonstration program opt in patterns as well as to address increasing elementary enrollment figures, especially in light of the change to universal full day kindergarten in 2008.

In 2010, consideration was given to address the change in Seth Boyden Demonstration program opt in patterns, namely a decrease in the number of students opting in from the South Mountain and Tuscan zones. This, coupled with the full day kindergarten programs, resulted in burdens on the facility capacity at both South Mountain and Tuscan Schools, both of which were seeing enrollments of over 600 students, with projections to go towards 650+ students if the increasing enrollments were not addressed. Although alternate plans were identified to reduce enrollments at South Mountain and Tuscan, it was acknowledged at the time that all of the elementary schools were projected to be utilizing all useable classroom space and therefore we could not move additional students without overloading the other schools in the district. The Board of Education was committed to creating a sustainable plan, and acknowledged that additional accommodations may be necessary in the future if enrollment figures continue to rise at the rate at which they had been. Rather than create a plan that moved families and then would have to move them again in the next few years, it was decided to move a minimal number of households and agreed to allow for as much grandfathering as possible so that the same families would not be impacted again should additional accommodations need to be made.

Board policy 8110 allows that the administration may balance the enrollments at specific grade levels between schools as necessary. These types of adjustments have been made over the past few years for some students enrolling after May 1st as necessary to balance enrollments between schools. By making these adjustments, we have been able to maintain a dedicated art room and a

dedicated music room at each elementary school. The potential of having to use these rooms for general classroom space so as to avoid constructing additional building space was acknowledged as part of the 2010 redistricting discussions.

As we begin the 2016-17 school year, we are a bit shy of the 10 year time frame, but elementary enrollments have exceeded projections for a few years and decisions for the 2017-18 school year need to be made. Included in the 2016-17 budget is funding to hire a redistricting consultant to assist with the attendance zone decisions that we are facing. With the continued increases in elementary enrollments, with expanded number of residential units being built in both South Orange and Maplewood, and with the increased demands on the building space with increased programming such as the reading intervention programs and STEAM curriculum needs, it is necessary for a long term review of our enrollments, programs, and building capacities across the district and spanning all grade levels. Administration is already working with architects to address programming needs and potentially growing enrollment demands. A dedicated redistricting consultant will not only help inform these decisions but will help to balance the enrollments to match the facility capacities.

ENROLLMENT CHANGES AND BUILDING CAPACITY

Elementary School Enrollment

Each Fall the District updates its enrollment projections based on the October 15 enrollments reported to the state. A professional demographer considers historical enrollment trends, local birth rate data, as well as considers residential development or anticipated program changes. The 2015 demographic study was performed by Whitehall Associates. This is the fourth year that Whitehall Associates has provided demographic projections for the District. While the projections are disaggregated by school and by grade level, the accuracy at this level of detail is uncertain, and should be used as general guidance in budgetary planning. Looking at the actual figures for October 2015 compared to Whitehall’s projections for this year, the overall enrollment projections were 100% accurate, however, while Whitehall’s enrollment projections are typically within 1% of the actual enrollments for the aggregated grade level figures, this year we experienced greater variation.

	Projections	Actuals	Actuals/Projections
Elementary Enrollment	3,262	3,339	102.36%
Middle School Enrollment	1,591	1,560	98.05%
High School Enrollment	1,916	1,877	97.96%
Total General Classroom Enrollment	6,769	6,776	100.10%
Ungraded Enrollment	111	104	93.69%
Total District Enrollment	6,880	6,880	100.00%

Kindergarten enrollment figures continued to increase at unprecedented rates. Prior to 2013-14, we would see Kindergarten enrollment rates of approximately 97% of calculated birth rates from 5 years prior. For the past two years we have seen Kindergarten enrollments at a rate of 106% of the calculated birth rate from 5 years earlier. The 2015-16 Kindergarten enrollment is approximately 120% of the calculated birth rate from the calculated birth rate from 5 years ago. It becomes difficult

to predict the Kindergarten enrollment for next year with this extreme outlier. Is it a single year anomaly or an indication of future year enrollment figures? The projections for 2015-2016 took into account the 106% survival ratio of the prior two years rather than the standard 6 year basis, but the 120% was unforeseen. On the other hand, both the middle school and high school enrollments were lower than anticipated, resulting in an overall enrollment exactly as projected. The continued higher elementary enrollments, especially at the Kindergarten level will have an impact on future building capacity needs and compels the need to revisit elementary space considerations.

Elementary enrollment has been increasing since 2006 by more than a 24% increase over the past 8 years (2,683 elementary students in the 2006-2007 school year compared with 3,320 elementary students in the current, 2015-2016, school year). While the elementary enrollment growth was anticipated to taper off over the last two years, Kindergarten enrollments continue to increase impacting enrollment projections for all grade levels into the future.

If elementary enrollments continue at similar rates to those we have been experiencing the past few years, we will continue to face space constraints at individual elementary buildings. All buildings will continue to be at capacity leaving little room for expanded programming or for alleviating space constraints at other buildings. We likely will continue to see discrepancies between buildings with some schools continuing to experience enrollments over 600 while others see enrollments drop under 500, if elementary boundaries are maintained as they are today. Some locations may face a shortage of one or two rooms by the time we reach 2018-19 if we continue to see these high elementary enrollments continue. We specifically continue to experience high enrollments at Tuscan Elementary School. While the changes in boundaries did curtail the projected enrollment growth, the fact that Kindergarten enrollments did not decline as anticipated has resulted in continued enrollments over 600 students, and in order to restrict even higher enrollments, late registrations have been enrolled at alternate schools. At the same time, other elementary schools continue to maximize capacity, so there is no obvious solution to reducing the higher enrollments at Tuscan School.

A thorough analysis of redistricting options should be considered. Redistricting discussions should consider the attendance zones for Seth Boyden, originally designed to receive about 50% of its enrollment through an opt-in program. Originally the elementary boundaries were created with the Seth Boyden zone being smaller to allow space for others to opt in. The South Mountain and Tuscan zones were made larger, anticipating that students from these zones would opt into the demonstration program at Seth Boyden. Over the years, we have seen a higher number of students opting in from the Clinton area and some still from the Tuscan area. At the same time we have been seeing the composition of the school experiencing a steady increase in the number of students eligible for free and reduced lunch and students requiring additional academic support. The Seth Boyden free and reduced lunch population composes 46% of the school enrollment, compared with 20% of the enrollment districtwide. The composition of the Seth Boyden population should be considered in any general attendance zone discussions.

The opening of the Montrose School building as an Early Learning Center provided some relief on those buildings that previously housed the preschool classes. Although the recommendation is for this building to house only preschool classes, the option of relocating Kindergarten classes to Montrose remains available should additional elementary space be needed. In addition, other considerations regarding Special Education programming may impact enrollment figures at elementary school buildings.

New Housing Developments

Demographic projections take into consideration new construction when developing enrollment projections. Although some current projects have the potential of adding a fair number of students, the projections anticipate that the students would be spread out by grade level. To date, this assumption has proved to be true but we continue to observe registrations from the new development addresses as increasing enrollments from each of these developments combined over time will add to our already burdened facilities. Since these projects are adding new residential space, not previously assigned to specific schools, we will consider the appropriate “zones” for these schools as we look at all of the enrollment figures. Notification of the attendance zones for each of these new developments will be posted on the website and sent to realtors as soon as they are determined, although they will be reminded that Policy 8110 does allow for adjustments as necessary. Any students that have enrolled prior to any adjustments to the attendance zones, will have the option to continue at the schools they are already attending.

ESTIMATED ELEMENTARY ENROLLMENT FOR 2016-17

Kindergarten enrollment figures are the most difficult to project. Enrollment patterns have been inconsistent the past few years so it is difficult to predict the enrollment levels anticipated over the summer. The kindergarten enrollment numbers to date are:

SCHOOL	Projected Kindergarten enrollment	Kindergarten enrollment as of 5/9/16	Percent Enrollment to Projections	Percent of total District Kindergarten
Clinton	99	73	-26.3%	15.1%
Marshall	139	164	18.0%	34.0%
Seth Boyden	71	49	-31.0%	10.2%
South Mountain	98	89	-9.2%	18.5%
Tuscan	99	107	8.1%	22.2%
TOTAL	506	482		

It is hard to predict how many additional students will enroll between now and the opening of school. The number of registrants after May, especially in Kindergarten and first grade, has fluctuated dramatically over the past few years. In looking at the increase at Tuscan, we compared the percent of Tuscan enrollment to the overall district enrollment for the Kindergarten grade level. As you can see from the chart above, Tuscan enrollment is 22.2% of the district elementary enrollment. For comparison, in 2009-2010, prior to redistricting, the Tuscan Kindergarten made up 22.7% of the district enrollment. After the redistricting this number dropped to 20.7% and remained constant in the following year at 20.8%. As of the current enrollment figures, the Tuscan Kindergarten enrollment has returned to 22.2% of the population. So while the Tuscan numbers are higher than anticipated, the percentage of the total suggests that the higher than anticipated enrollments exists for other district schools.

Total enrollments by school are currently projected as follows:

	Clinton	Jefferson	Marshall	Seth Boyden	So.Mtn/Annex	Tuscan
Projected * Enrollment	562	465	504	513	595	647
% of Total	17.1%	13.7%	15.3%	15.6%	18.1%	19.7%

* non-self-contained students

One of the considerations discussed with the boundary changes, although not one of the driving forces, was to even out enrollments among the schools. This could not be accomplished immediately while the buildings are being used to capacity since some buildings have more classroom space than others, but the following chart indicates the move towards more level enrollments. We knew that space was going to continue to be tight, but manageable to the point of avoiding costly additions to the elementary buildings for enrollment purposes.

It is important to recall what the enrollments at South Mountain and Tuscan would have looked like if we did not make boundary adjustments. The enrollments at South Mountain and Tuscan were projected to have been 665 students and 667 students, respectively, a number of years ago if the boundaries had not been tweaked. With the increased enrollments everywhere, capacity is a concern at all of the schools and with the continued high enrollments, construction of additional classroom space may be warranted. These considerations are all part of the redistricting consulting proposal being considered.

Building Classroom Count

	Clinton	Jefferson	Marshall	Seth Boyden	So.Mtn/Annex	Tuscan
Number of Classrooms (# portables included)	27 (4)	25	25 (2)	26 (6)	28	29 (4)
Projected Rooms '16-'17 (non-self contained)	26-27 (+1-2 SC)	20 (+2 SC)	24 (+1 SC)	26	27	29

Middle School Enrollment

Middle School enrollment has been increasing since 2007 with over a 19% increase over the past 7 years (1,332 middle school students in 2007-2008 compared with 1,587 middle school students in the 2014-15 school year), although there was a slight decrease in middle school enrollment in the current year with a smaller 6th grade class. . The high elementary numbers will be matriculating into the middle schools and the middle school enrollments are expected to continue to grow for the next five years, reaching 1,728 students in 2020-21, or another 10% or 168 students more.

With the middle schools already fully utilizing their buildings, it was determined that additional classroom space would be needed at the middle school level. The addition to Maplewood Middle School, opened last year, added an additional 7 classrooms to the building to accommodate the growing enrollment. It is likely that attendance zone adjustments will need to be made so that the increasing enrollment numbers will be attending Maplewood Middle.

It is anticipated that the adjustments will be made one grade at a time so that incoming students would change schools rather than impacting students already attending South Orange Middle. Consideration should be given to address middle school enrollment zones when considering the elementary enrollments. Consideration for grandfathering families with children already at South Orange Middle should be taken into consideration.