

Attendance Area Review Committee
Report on Recommendation for Elementary Attendance Area Changes
January 15th, 2019

Executive Summary

In Fall, 2018, Superintendent Shay Mikalson charged district staff to create the Attendance Area Review Committee (AARC), a group that would be responsible for recommending new district attendance areas in anticipation of the 2019 opening of a new 600-student elementary school in north-central Bend. During the process, the committee reviewed existing attendance areas and proposed adjustments in order to both populate the new school and balance enrollment across all elementary schools in Bend.

The proposed new elementary boundaries are set to go into effect in Fall, 2019; new secondary boundaries will go into effect in Fall, 2021.

The committee, composed of 16 community members and 10 school/department staff members, convened for the first time in early October and met regularly throughout the fall and early winter. To allow for broad committee participation, the group subdivided into three teams, with each team responsible for creating new elementary attendance areas. By late fall, teams shared their maps with the entire AARC and received committee members' feedback. In December, after a second round of public meetings, the AARC spent two meetings processing public feedback and shaping the attendance area changes that are the subject of this report.

Public input was critical to the AARC's process. The committee hosted its first public session in October. Though attendance was limited, over 300 individuals responded to the accompanying online survey, providing input on priorities for decision making and the process generally. A second round of public meetings was scheduled for early December. These meetings had a combined attendance of approximately 120. Additionally, over 500 individuals responded to the second online survey. AARC members reviewed summary data and findings, as well as the individual comments of all respondents.

The proposed attendance area changes, included in Appendix A of this report, were adopted with broad consensus by the AARC: not a single member opposed the recommended map. The committee also recommended "grandfathering" all current fourth graders into their current schools if the students and their families so desire.

Introduction

In May, 2017, voters in Bend-La Pine Schools' boundaries once again demonstrated their support of our growing school district by passing a bond that included construction of both a new elementary school and a new high school to meet both current and anticipated future overcrowding caused by decades of continued enrollment growth.

In the fall of 2018, a year before the new elementary school is scheduled to open in north central Bend, 11 of our elementary schools were at or near capacity in enrollment. Notably, two schools in northwest Bend (Miller and High Lakes) and three schools in northeast Bend (Lava Ridge, Ponderosa, and Buckingham) were among these. The location of the new elementary school in north-central Bend is well suited to address existing schools' capacity issues throughout the area.

The struggle to accommodate a growing student population is not unique to the district's elementary schools. In addition, all three large neighborhood high schools are at or near capacity. The new high school, which will be located in southeast Bend, will open in Fall, 2021.

Each time a new school opens, student attendance areas are reviewed and redrawn. This has happened often in Bend-La Pine Schools over the last two decades. For example, since opening High Lakes Elementary in 1999, the district has added six new elementary schools: Pine Ridge (2003), Ensworth (2004), Ponderosa (2008) W. E. Miller (2009), and Silver Rail (2015).

In order to populate the new schools and to balance enrollment across the district, the superintendent charged district staff to create a broad-based attendance area review committee. This group would be responsible for proposing new elementary attendance areas by January, 2019, to go into effect in Fall, 2019; and new middle and high school attendance areas by Spring, 2020, to go into effect in Fall, 2021.

Process

District leaders began the process by establishing the Attendance Area Review Committee (AARC). In addition to a press release from the district, schools distributed information in newsletters and other communication. 29 staff and 54 community members applied. Ultimately, the team selected 16 community members, representing 10 different elementary school areas; and 10 staff, representing 9 different schools/departments.

Working with the school board's guidance and gathering input from an October survey and community forum, the AARC established five priorities to guide decision making. The first and most important was to balance enrollment across all neighborhood schools. The other four were as follows:

- Safe biking and walking routes to schools;

- Natural, geographic, physical, and traffic considerations related to car and bus travel;
- Socio-economic balance and demographic equity, including race; and
- Family connections to neighborhood schools.

In order to maximize involvement of all committee members, the AARC divided into three workgroups. Each workgroup studied common data that included enrollment projections, building capacity needs, target enrollment, traffic patterns, student walking zones, socio-economic and race/ethnicity data, and historical attendance area lines. The groups were then charged with independently creating their own maps of new attendance areas.

At the start and/or end of meetings, the group came together to ask questions or to share data. Of particular interest were insights gained from other attendance area change processes. Current committee members who had served on previous teams shared insights and helped the committee find data that had been useful in the past.

Workgroups met multiple times throughout October and November, then shared their maps with the entire AARC for feedback and questions. In December, committee members shared the draft maps in public meetings held at Sky View Middle School and Pacific Crest Middle School. In addition, the public was invited to provide feedback on the maps in an online survey. After these public meetings, both a small representative subcommittee and the entire AARC met in December to review all the feedback and to further revise the preferred draft map.

On Tuesday, December 18th, the committee reached consensus on a final recommendation, with no committee member expressing an objection to the proposed map.

Note: In addition to examining the attendance areas for elementary schools in Bend, a few representatives from the AARC joined building administrators and parent representatives from all the South County elementary schools to review the South County elementary boundaries. After two meetings, the team recommended a single change to an area under development. No current students live in this area.

Communication and Public Participation

Among the core values of Bend-La Pine Schools are operating with transparency and including staff, students, families, and the community at large in decision-making processes. The current attendance area review process has been no exception.

The first step of the district's communication outreach was the solicitation for applicants to the AARC. As noted earlier in this report, the district received a large number of applications from both community members (54) and staff (29). Committee facilitators chose participants from a wide variety of attendance areas, with a wealth of both professional skills and personal interests in the process.

Second, the AARC hosted a community forum at Sky View Middle School on October 16th. The purpose of the forum was to provide more information on the process and to solicit community input on priorities for decision-making, as well as general feedback about the attendance area review process. While attendance at the forum was low, despite outreach at every elementary school in the district, over 300 individuals completed the online survey. The comments were shared with all AARC members.

Next, the AARC hosted a second round of forums during the first week of December at both Sky View Middle School and Pacific Crest Middle School. At these forums, team members provided information about their proposed maps, answered questions, and solicited community feedback. Approximately 120 individuals attended the forums, and over 500 individuals completed the second online survey. Both a summary of the overall results and a spreadsheet with all comments from participants were shared with the AARC prior to their December meeting.

Finally, a group of homeowners from the Awbrey Butte neighborhood submitted a letter to the committee leaders on December 11th, expressing their objections to the proposed attendance area changes. In addition, they included three maps for consideration. The letter and the maps were also shared with the AARC at their December meeting.

In summary, including both online and live feedback, the AARC had the opportunity to receive information from between 500-1000 individuals (the range is large because the district did not track whether individuals provided feedback more than once).

Attendance Area Recommendation

The AARC's recommended attendance areas, beginning in Fall, 2019, are included in Appendix A to this report. The recommended changes alter boundaries for almost every elementary school in the Bend area. The district estimates that approximately 809, or 12.3%, of current students in grades K-4 will be impacted by the changes. When the AARC selected its final map, they paid close attention to the number of students potentially impacted by the changes. The two other maps committee teams developed and ultimately rejected impacted 875 students (13.4%) and 976 (14.9%), respectively.

The committee recognizes these changes may present challenges to affected students, families, and staffs; however, the recommendation allows the district to balance enrollment across elementary schools, forestalling the need for construction of another new elementary school for as long as possible.

Continuing Challenges

Perhaps the largest challenge the AARC faced reflects the district's outstanding schools: with over 800 online surveys completed, not one single family expressed an interest in moving to a new school. Respondents welcomed an additional school to address overcrowding, but they wanted their students to remain at their current school.

The committee faced other challenges, as well. While the AARC worked diligently to create a map that reflects its priorities, the committee also acknowledges that not every individual's goals for the process were achieved. In summarizing the results of the December online survey, we identified several themes:

- **Minimize disruptions:** Responders wanted the committee to select the option that creates disruption for the fewest families. This was mentioned across the board.
- **Focus on commuting safety and not asking families to cross major roadways:** Roads receiving many mentions include Highway 20 (east of Bend) and Mt. Washington.
- **Consider walking and biking distance:** This came up repeatedly by commenters from R.E. Jewell (Foxborough) and W.E. Miller (Shevlin Ridge area).
- **Don't ask families who recently switched boundaries to switch again.**
- **Keep neighborhoods together:** Many responses from Skyline Ridge area (Miller), Awbrey Butte neighborhood (High Lakes), Foxborough (Jewell) and Quiet Canyon (Ponderosa).
- **New school traffic concerns:** Many responders had concerns about the safety of travel to the new elementary school and also had concerns about the distance students would travel to get to the new school.

One continuing challenge is with commuting/traffic. With the location of the new school and the capacity issues in both northwest and northeast Bend elementary schools, neighborhoods from both sides of a major roadway are included in the new school's proposed attendance area.

Another challenge that the committee worked hard to address without complete success is that of moving neighborhoods that were previously moved in the 2015 attendance area review process.

Transitions

In addition to recommending new attendance areas, the AARC was also charged with addressing concerns about transitioning students. The committee supports "grandfathering" current fourth grade students. In other words, this year's fourth graders affected by attendance area changes may elect to stay at their current school for the 2019-20 school year to complete their elementary education, as long as their families complete the appropriate request form. Transportation for students who "grandfather" into their current school will be families' responsibility.

For families of other students who wish to stay at their current schools or for those who want to attend a school outside their attendance area, committee leaders emphasize the district's commitment to school choice. Evidence of that value lies in the longstanding process of honoring requests for students to enroll in schools outside of their attendance area. Significant numbers of students throughout the district participate in the Area Change Request (ACR) process.

Conclusion

In closing, AARC facilitators once again thank the 26 committee members for their active and thoughtful participation in the process and present this recommendation to the superintendent for his consideration. He is encouraged to contact any committee member for additional information or clarification.

Community Members

Tom Bahrman, High Lakes Elementary School/Summit High School
Adam Bowles, W. E. Miller Elementary School/Summit High School
Clint Burleigh, Bear Creek Elementary School/Bend Senior High School
Julie Flannery, Silver Rail Elementary School/Bend Senior High School
Shannon Hinderberger, Elk Meadow Elementary School/Summit High School
Jeanette King, R. E. Jewell Elementary School/Bend Senior High School
Mike Larraneta, Buckingham Elementary School/Mountain View High School
Steve Lindsay, High Lakes Elementary School/Summit High School
Tasha McFarland, Lava Ridge Elementary School/Mountain View High School
Ryan McHugh, Lava Ridge Elementary School/Mountain View High School
Christy McLeod, Silver Rail Elementary School/Bend Senior High School
Mel Oberst, Pine Ridge Elementary School/Summit High School
Andrea Shockey, Lava Ridge Elementary School/Mountain View High School
Mel Soares, Pine Ridge Elementary School/Summit High School
Jen Souza, High Lakes Elementary School/Summit High School
Bev Timm, Ponderosa Elementary School/Mountain View High School

The schools listed for each community member reflect both the elementary and high school attendance areas where they now reside.

District Staff

Lisa Birk, Pacific Crest Middle School staff/Mountain View High School
Joshua Boehme, Sky View Middle School staff/Bend Senior High School
Morgan Davis, Bend Senior High School staff
Jay Etnier, Summit High School staff
Frank Hanson, Elk Meadow Elementary School staff/Summit High School
Susie Heydon, Mountain View High School staff
Kinsey Martin, Education Center staff/Bend Senior High School
Dana Pedersen, Ensworth Elementary School staff/Mountain View High School
Megan Silvey, La Pine Elementary School staff/Bend Senior High School
Steven Wetherald, Bend Senior High School staff

For staff who do not work at a high school, the high schools indicated after the slash are the high school attendance areas where they now reside.