

Meeting minutes - Numbers committee

2/8/10

In attendance: Aaron Beuchel, Chris Donovan, Ann Reichlin, Jalil Beuchel, Allen Lambert, Lauren McFeeley, Tom Clavel, James Haines-Burnham, Michael Culotta, Jacquelyn Beuchel

A specific mandate for the meeting was to identify a list of data to be collected and questions to be answered.

A critical question was asked at the start of the meeting - how does the Superintendent and Board propose to divide the neighborhood? This answer will have an impact on a lot of the numbers. In response, Allen suggested that the Board will look at macro issues only. They will vote on whether to move forward based on projected savings, then will ask staff to flesh out the details. They won't share details until after the decision on whether to move forward is made.

Allen has estimated from various bits of info that the plan will have to look something like:

About 100 kids to BJM (Titus area plus 60 from neighborhood)
Perhaps 60 to South Hill
Leaving 40 to Belle Sherman

Transportation:

The district transportation office claims they will not need to buy new buses or add new routes to transport the FC kids. This does not factor in pre-K busing needs, which may be a big issue (times 3 and 4-year-olds spend on a bus, need for aides, transfers, harnesses). They also did not consider possible busing needs due to a change in middle school feeding patterns. Overall, transportation thinks that costs may increase, but not enough to offset the savings from closing FC. The issue is not necessarily the need to buy new buses, but rather adding new routes, which will require additional labor, mechanical wear, fuel, etc. FC students will need to be bused to SH and Belle Sherman, at least.

ACTION: Allen will speak with the head of transportation about these issues.

Cost of operating Fall Creek as opposed to other ICSD schools per student enrollment:

Board does not know this, may not be a question they will look at. May be difficult to make an efficiency argument, or not worth it. Rob Steuteville was

not able to attend the meeting but has come up with some rough numbers based on info he could get from ICSD.

Enrollment Numbers:

A current breakdown of enrollments at all elementary schools by grade is available on the PTA website. There is an argument that FC can't accept any more students - mixed age groups is being looked into as an option. The Superintendent has an idea of the growth projections by elementary school. There are numbers in the redistricting study as well.

ACTION: Ann and Allen will contact principals from BJM, Belle Sherman and South Hill to determine how much room there is in the other schools and how they plan to accommodate FC students.

Kelly is looking into the breakdown of open enrollment, but we can assume that 30 kids going back to 6 schools can be easily absorbed back to their home schools. For now the Board plans to only send FC open enrolled students back to their home schools, not the entire district's open enrollees.

Chris will look at the redistricting study for growth projections.

Tom will contact David Brown, a development sociologist at Cornell who does local demographics

Sending FC students to other schools:

Possible numbers:

100 kids to BJM (Titus area plus 60 from neighborhood)

60 to South Hill

40 to Belle Sherman

Goal for district is to increase class size district wide - 23 target, 25-27 where starts to affect other goals. We need to press Superintendent and Board on where exact boundaries are planned. The goal is cost reduction - this means increasing class size to eliminate positions.

IMPORTANT POINT - this may not work as neatly as they plan, as grade levels of students in each boundary are different. We need to find a grade where it won't work.

ACTION: Ann, Tom and Allen will meet with Karen on this. Lauren will contact Tim Logue, Joanne Cornish, former PTA president and city planner may be a resource. Will draft a FOIA to get maps and other info from the district.

Pre-K Issues:

Bathrooms will NOT need to be retrofitted, unless there's a student with special needs. Building itself may not need changes, but we should look at the adequacy of parking for busses and pre-K parents, and the impact on the neighborhood. The need for special services in the building, such as an OT room, will need to be provided - this causes a possible duplication of services if the same services are still provided in the student's home school. Building will still need nurse, director, custodial.

If a large number of special needs pre-K students are housed together, there may be a need to revisit student's placement documents and change IEPs changed due to lack of typical peers.

ACTION: Jalil Beuchel looking into these issues

South of creek neighborhood:

These kids have already gone through redistricting. Mobilize parents? Studies have shown larger school/classes more proportionally affect lower socio-economic students.

Other issues:

Health - no one wanted to pursue at this moment.

Strategies:

Submit a list of written questions to Superintendent and Board before 5:00pm tomorrow.

ACTION: Allen

Overwhelm the Board with detail, showing the complexity and difficulty of taking this on now. Our questions will make them see that the plan to close FC is not well thought-out and will be too difficult. Details will make the difference. Get enough doubt out there to kill the plan for now. New superintendent, new board members next year - will care more about politics, more sensitive to neighborhood needs.

The group decided to focus for now on our school and not look for alternative cost-cutting measures in other areas of the district/budget

Focus questions at beginning of the meeting. Questions to ask:
(note: try to frame questions so they don't permit just a "yes" or "no" answer)

Where will you house the Danby people and operations?

How can you close Danby given the IT folks need to be there? IT equipment occupies 5000 sq. ft.

What would happen if you couldn't match numbers to school by grade level?

How will you manage longer bus rides and the need for transfers for 3 and 4-year-olds?

Are you going to add new bus routes or change the boundaries for walkers?

Note: Four tenths of a mile is the distance elementary student can walk - district policy. Farm St. is the boundary for BJM.

The district developed a set of core principles when initiating the redistricting plan - which of these principles are going to go by the wayside?

How are you going to ensure the boundaries meet your goals as far as class sizes?

How many new bus routes needed?

What is an acceptable length of time on a bus for 3 and 4 year-olds?

Have you considered necessary changes to feeder patterns?

Will larger class sizes require more aides? Associated costs?

Afterschool issues? If the other schools afterschool programs are full, will FC students be penalized?

Bottom line - Superintendent/Board want to eliminate teachers/staff.

NOTE: Everyone working on action items should send results to Aaron for collection/ distribution.