

Neighborhood Schools Study and Recommendation

Prepared for:

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Superintendent

Waukegan Community Unit School District Number 60

Waukegan, Illinois

Prepared by:

Neighborhood Schools Committee

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NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS

This neighborhood schools study was requested by the superintendent, Dr. Batiste, on behalf of the Waukegan Board of Education. This project began with a study of the history of neighborhood schools in Waukegan and looking at Board notes from 1999 to 2001 when a similar attempt was made to redraw the school boundaries. It was determined that for this goal to be successful, we would need to involve all parties from the beginning of the process; including transportation, principals, teachers, parents from all areas including magnet schools, and members of the community.

A voting committee was created to have a core group of participants who would ultimately decide what was included in the proposal submitted to Dr. Batiste. Work was done to formalize the charge of the committee, set a protocol for each meeting to include public input, and to set the composition of the voting committee. The voting committee consists of five elementary parents (one from a magnet school), three middle school parents, two principals (one elementary and one middle school), one teacher, and three community members (one black, one hispanic, and one white). Applications were sent out through the schools and into the community. Applicants were then selected at a Board meeting on February 12, 2008, via random drawing.

Maps were drawn up by First Transportation showing the district's current monolingual boundaries and the number of students in each area. Further maps were drawn creating smaller zones to "mix and match" to create new boundaries. Several boundaries contained too many students for the capacity of the school assigned (especially on the south and west sides of the district).

The committee looked at scenarios involving different grade configurations. If all elementary schools include kindergarten, then Whittier School could become a neighborhood school. If all elementary schools include grade 6, then Abbott School and Webster School could become elementary neighborhood schools.

Whittier Kindergarten Center was created by adding kindergarten classrooms to a pre-kindergarten school to help elementary schools running out of classroom space. The kindergarten teacher and his or her pupils were simply located at Whittier School. Over the years, more and more schools needed the classroom space and relocated their kindergarten program so that now Whittier houses 80% of the district's kindergarten classrooms. The ties to the individual schools have since been severed and all students are placed in classrooms according to need and not by home school. Whittier Kindergarten Center has made great advances in improving the kindergarten curriculum and helping prepare all students for first grade.

The committee recommends a Pre-K, K – 5, 6 – 8, 9 – 12 grade configuration. Utilizing Whittier School as a K – 5 building helps alleviate the overcrowding in the Glenwood, Hyde Park, Glen Flora, and Washington neighborhoods. In contrast, going with a 1 – 6 grade configuration would create more transportation needs for the schools and overcrowd the remaining three middle schools.

The committee also looked at scenarios involving different magnet configurations. Currently, two schools on the south side are magnet schools that do not draw from neighborhoods. The committee debated the point of having any magnet programs, and if we do, where would they best be located.

The committee decided that since Cooke Magnet School has a strong program which attracts many families and that the building would not have many students who could walk due to hazardous conditions, it should remain as a magnet at its current location.

The committee also recommends that Lyon Magnet program should remain at its current location with the addition of some neighborhood students. The magnet programs need to attract students from the south side of the city to alleviate overcrowding. If the magnet program were moved to the north, a large amount of bussing would still need to take place to fill that program. In the committee's plan, students immediately around Lyon School would be placed there and those in the outlying area would be assigned to Clearview School which is a large building on the north side with space, which may in turn encourage the students' applications to Lyon.

Four sub-committees were formed to discuss boundaries, policy rules, communication, and safe routes to school. They reported back to the Neighborhood Schools Committee to create the recommendation.

The map and boundaries sub-committee looked at adjusting the school zones in comparison with school capacity. The elementary and middle school boundary maps are attached, which include all students in that area independent of language or special needs. There will be cases of low-incidence programs that should be placed at the school which has the most classroom space and is nearer to the majority of that population. Examples of these programs include; Fine Arts Magnet, Applied Learning Academy Magnet, Project Discovery Gifted, GAP Gifted, Autism, Hearing Impaired, Transitional Program of Instruction (ESL for non-Spanish speakers), and others.

The boundaries were drawn to balance current borders and to make the most geographic sense while maintaining capacity and maximizing walkers. Areas that would need to be bussed to any school were assigned schools with lower capacity. Care should be made to allow all students from an elementary school to go to the same middle school when possible, but geography should be the deciding factor. These zones are based on school capacity and district attendance in the 2007-2008 school year.

The schools on the south side of Waukegan will still be at or over capacity. We recommend that the magnet programs look at recruiting and accepting students from schools with large attendance areas to ease possible overcrowding. Forced transfers should be kept to a minimum. Every effort should be made at the home school to teach the neighborhood students. The committee recommends that clusters of schools be created for those cases when combining classrooms for overcrowding becomes necessary (see attachment). These schools should share the same bell schedule and be encouraged to collaborate on educational issues so that if siblings are separated, there is little difference between the schools.

The policy rules sub-committee looked at implementation, transportation, and transfer rules for certain situations. Current practice allows students to stay in their current school until they matriculate even if the family moves within the district to another school's attendance boundaries. Families tend to stay in schools that they like and request to transfer to their new school if they do not like the current school. The committee recommends that students who move within the district during the year are not given bus transportation to their new address and must transfer schools at the end of the

school year, at which point they may complete a Parent Voluntary Request to return if there is space.

School Board Policy 5119.1 (see appendix) should be followed in assigning schools. Forced transfers and NCLB choice transfers will be given transportation. Parent voluntary transfers will not be given transportation with the exception of health factors and as mandated by federal or state law.

The committee recommends that School Board Policy 3505 (see appendix) be amended to provide free transportation only from the student's residence, and not from the daycare provider. The district should enact a fee system for students to utilize the bus from a daycare provider.

It is recommended that this plan be implemented for the start of school in August 2009. Current fourth grade and seventh grade students may elect to stay in their current schools next year without district-provided transportation, all other students must register at and transfer to the new home school and request a parent voluntary transfer to return. This provision does not apply to students currently enrolled in special programs.

.The safe routes to school sub-committee looked at possibly running a concurrent program and applying for a federal grant to improve safety with children walking or riding bicycles to school. The City of Waukegan is very interested in partnering with us in this endeavor and it is a fantastic opportunity to improve infrastructure and provide education programs for walkers and bike riders. We recommend that a committee be formed to study this, implement the changes it can, and prepare a grant to submit next summer for additional funding.

The communication sub-committee will create a plan of town hall meetings and public presentations to share the committee's recommendations that Dr. Batiste brings to the Board. Town Hall style meetings will be held throughout the district during first semester. Notice of new home school should be sent out in January and mail-in registration will begin in February

Moving to neighborhood schools will help create a community feel in each building. Schools are encouraged to involve parents, businesses, and other community members in their school improvement plans. By having a set community, this will help the principal and building leadership team focus their energies on a section of Waukegan and build partnerships to help the community and to help their students excel.

Moving to neighborhood schools will also decrease the total number of busses needed by the district. Strengthening the rules on who is allowed to use district transportation will result in an even larger decrease.

These changes will also make class sizes uneven throughout the district. There will be schools with lower neighborhood populations, and thus we will have a need for more teachers in the district. If the district overcrowds students to consolidate classes, the neighborhood schools will cease to exist again.

Respectfully submitted September 17, 2008