

**Community Meeting
Winchester Elementary Schools Redistricting Initiative
March 15, 2004**

On March 15 Superintendent Jim Marini made a presentation to about 70 community members summarizing the work to date of the Redistricting Committee. Dr. Marini reviewed the need for redistricting, guiding principles identified by the committee, the process and timeline for the study, and possible models to be used.

At the conclusion of his presentation, questions were addressed.

Summary of Questions

Models

Where did the models come from?

Do we have any idea how to redistrict Lincoln? How will students be identified to be moved out of Lincoln?

Do we know where the new lines will be?

Could new Pre-K families be moved to other schools instead of the kids currently enrolled? Have you looked at allowing people to volunteer to move?

What about opening the Mystic School again?

If we move the central office, where will it go? What about using the “swing space” at Parkhurst?

What is going to happen when all these kids hit middle school?

The models will be developed from committee ideas, examples from other towns, and suggestions from the school committee. They will support the guiding principles. Then, our consultant will develop maps with the merged census data and GIS (Geographic Information System). One of our models will include a 6th school but opening an additional school would be costly. We are looking into options for the central office. The Carriage House next to Sanborn House is one possibility and Parkhurst is another. The Mystic School is currently in a rental agreement with the Recreation Department and the Winchester After School Program.

Data

Where did the data come from?

Is growth even across all districts or is one district growing at a faster rate than the others?

Are we looking carefully at all data? V.O. experienced unanticipated growth. Data needs to be accurate. Have you considered senior turnover, new families moving in, new construction, newborn data and transients?

How long do you hope the redistricting will be effective with 5 years of data?

Sam Rippen explained the enrollment projections. The numbers take into consideration number of births five years prior in relation to the number of Kindergarteners enrolled. He compared his projections to those prepared by NESDEC (New England School Development Council). Growth has not been even across elementary schools. Lincoln has seen the most growth.

Sustainability is a priority. We will look all the factors that can effect enrollment.

Budget

How does the override affect this redistricting process, especially if we lose teachers?

How feasible is it to add a sixth school or more teachers in the current budget environment?

Will recommendations be within the financial constraints?

If there are going to be 5 new classrooms at Ambrose, is there enough money to hire the teachers? How is this going to be funded?

If you are re-allocating resources, do we have enough resources to do that?

We will have to redistrict regardless of what happens to the budget and the override. Budget limitations will influence the choices we have.

Master Plan

Are the guidelines optimal for class size?

How many kids are in an average class size for K,1,2,3 etc.?

We currently have 19.5 average kids per teacher. The School Committee's Master plan goals are to keep K-2nd grade at 20 children or fewer and grades 3-5 between 20 and 22. Class size is our 1st priority.

Buffer Zones

Could the buffers satisfy the requirements without redistricting?

Will the buffers allow the district to remain the same?

The buffer zone concept will only be used to help us sustain redistricting. First we need to bring relief to Lincoln, then we can consider buffer zones.

Implementation

Have we considered giving parents and children a chance to express a preference?

Will there be an appeals process?

Will 5th graders be "grand-fathered" so they can remain in their current school? If a 5th grader has younger siblings, will they be "grand-fathered" too?

What about individuals who are overly burdened by moving between schools; kids who have already been moved through swing spaces?

Can a Kindergarten student open enroll into a new school before redistricting takes effect?

We are not going to be able to please everyone. We will not be seeking individual preferences. However, the committee has representatives from each school. They are working to get your feedback and keep you informed. There would have to be extraordinary, compelling reasons to consider an appeal. Ultimately, the Superintendent will make the final decision whether or not to grant an appeal. We will look into "grand-fathering" 5th graders. But new open enrollment for next year will not be an option.

Neighborhoods

Are we sensitive to neighborhood pockets?

Does GIS give consideration to kids who are close enough that they can walk to school so they can continue to walk?

How do you determine walking distance? Can real data be put in, not just a mileage constraint?

We value neighborhood schools vs. kids being bussed. Consider the ability to walk when close.

Can we apply common sense to walking? For example, if a child can see his or her school from their house why wouldn't they attend a school that close? How do you explain it to a child if this is the case and they get redistricted?

Walking is a priority.

We will take neighborhoods and the ability to walk into consideration. Walking to school is a highly held value in this community.

Process

Are there other towns or school systems that have recently done something similar which we can replicate or study?

Does the school committee have the final say?

After working together for an entire year, why wouldn't the Redistricting Committee's decisions stand?

How does the committee interact? Are decisions made by consensus or vote? Do any voices have a stronger influence than others?

Will the committee recommend one specific model, or pros and cons of multiple models?

Will it be weighted?

When was the last time Winchester redistricted? How did it go? Has anything been learned from past redistricting? Did past redistricting address moving the sixth grade to middle school?

When are the GIS study and maps going to be done?

The school committee will make the final decision based on recommendations of the Superintendent. The committee is acting in an advisory capacity. No one on the committee is a "shrinking violet". Everyone takes his/her role quite seriously. We are working together to consider our guiding principles, look at the models and see what is in the best interest of the community.

Winchester last redistricted in 1993. Many of the issues were similar to now.

We are looking at what other towns have done for example the buffer zone idea came from Brookline.

We will have results from the GIS study before the end of this school year and come back to you with maps.

Transportation

Will analysis include busing patterns?

We will look into busing costs as well as traffic patterns.