

Preliminary update from the Attendance Areas PreK-12 Standing Committee

The [Attendance Areas PreK-12 Standing Committee](#) is still developing its formal recommendation to the superintendent; however, its members wanted to provide a preliminary update.

At its meeting on May 23, the committee reviewed feedback it received via the online survey; neighborhood meetings the week of May 13; email and phone calls; and PTA meetings, neighborhood walks and one-on-one meetings the co-chairs have held since fall.

After additional discussion and two polling exercises, the committee reached consensus to recommend [option 1](#) and eliminate [option 2](#). The recommendation to Superintendent Greg Baker will include the middle school boundaries outlined in option 1, however, the committee is interested in doing some additional work on some of the recommended elementary school boundary changes prior to the recommendation being submitted.

Committee members gave the following reasons for choosing option 1:

- Stability of middle school boundaries over time for lasting change to minimize future disruption, whether it's to accommodate future growth and/or a new middle school. If a fifth middle school is ever built, it will likely be in the northeastern part of our district, and the option 1's boundaries are more optimal and would mean fewer future adjustments.
- Acknowledgement that there are routes to school for biking and walking to and from Columbia to Shuksan, and that it's up to families and students to decide if they want to walk, bike, bus (if eligible) or drive to school. The district works with the city to help identify routes to school, but ultimately, it's up to a family to decide what works best for them. The committee reviewed a map and heard from staff who recently biked and walked between Columbia and Shuksan between 5 and 6 p.m. on a weeknight.
- Less disruption for Silver Beach in making an elementary move, but not middle school.
- Larger cohort of middle school students that move from Shuksan to Bellingham High (Birchwood and Columbia students will be together in both middle and high school).
- Concern about traffic patterns on north side of the city, especially via Sunset, for Silver Beach families getting to and from Shuksan versus Columbia families who could walk, bike or have a shorter and less congested bus ride or commute.

Committee members agreed their recommendation to Dr. Baker should include the following qualifications:

- expected timeline for implementing these new boundaries, including phasing in and grandfathering;
- support for families and students in identifying routes to school, specifically for Columbia residents traveling to Shuksan Middle School by bike, foot and/or bus;
- ideas for integrating families into their new school communities, including those who did not participate in the survey or meetings;
- clarification that this option does not adjust high school boundaries (beyond one small portion of State Street residents who will attend Lowell, Fairhaven and Sehome); and
- encouragement for the district to offer an after-school activities bus for Cordata kids who will attend Whatcom, and for Carl Cozier students who will attend Fairhaven so they can more easily participate in after-school activities.

The committee is planning to meet in June to finalize elementary boundaries of option 1 and submit its recommendation to Dr. Baker in the coming weeks.