

**2013-14 Happy Valley/Lowell Attendance Area Committee**  
**January 9, 2014 6:30-7:30 Larrabee Gym**  
**Parent Input Session**

Heidi Ling, Larrabee parent and committee member, welcomed everyone to the meeting, and introduced Rob McElroy and Ron Cowan (Co-Chairs of the Attendance Area Committee). She also acknowledged that Dr. Greg Baker (Superintendent) was in attendance to listen to the feedback and that he has sat in on some of the committee meetings.

Ron Cowan thanked Heidi for the introduction and stated that the committee takes this work seriously, and also stated that the process is not just a mathematical exercise involving the number of students and their distance from the schools. The committee recognizes the impact that this process has on children and families.

Rob McElroy talked about the purpose of this committee (to propose boundary adjustments to Lowell and Happy Valley to serve Larrabee students as a result of Larrabee being retired as a K-5 school at the end of the 2013-14 school year). He outlined the purpose and format for the evening, which includes 15-20 minutes for the committee to provide background information, followed by those in attendance being able to ask questions and give verbal feedback to the committee. Rob asked that questions be held until the Question & Answer session in about 15 minutes.

Heidi went over the Consideration Factors that the committee used to analyze the new boundary possibilities. These factors were included in the packets that went home to families prior to winter break.

Heidi introduced Kate Wearn, Lowell parent and committee member, who shared the committee's website and talked about the process that the committee went through to arrive at the scenario. The committee has met 5 times and has toured Happy Valley and Lowell. The visits to Happy Valley and Lowell enabled the committee to understand how many classes Lowell and Happy Valley can comfortably accommodate, as well as to learn about the developmental preschool at Happy Valley and the Bridges classroom at Lowell. The committee knows that these two programs are integral to the cultures of their respective schools. Kate outlined the various aspects of the committee process, which included considering enrollment, demographic data, free and/or reduced lunch information (including transfer students), traffic patterns and walking/bus routes. The committee was fortunate to work with Steve Walker, a GIS expert, who helped the committee use GIS technology. The map was able to be divided into a set of discrete units (tiles), which enabled the committee to select any subset of those tiles, assign them to Happy Valley or Lowell, and see how that would affect how many students would be assigned to Lowell vs. how many would be assigned to Happy Valley. Kate demonstrated how the committee used the GIS technology to look at different possibilities. The committee weighed all of the factors and came up with the scenario that is being presented today.

Kate introduced Rachel Williams and Andy Robinson, Happy Valley parents and committee members. Rachel and Andy presented the draft proposal and explained the boundaries under this proposal. Andy explained that to visualize some of the areas, the committee decided to take a walking tour of the neighborhood, which helped them to understand how the various roads come together within the neighborhood. Rachel talked about how the committee discussed the number of students that Happy

Valley and Lowell can each take – Happy Valley can take as many as 100 students and Lowell can take 50. She also stated that the committee looked at student demographics, and the number of free/reduced students is statistically not a large number and did not result in changing the percentages in a significant way, although the draft proposal does slightly increase the free/reduced percentage at Lowell and slightly decrease the free/reduced percentage at Happy Valley.

Tanya Rowe (Executive Director of Communications and Community Relations) asked that the next 5 minutes be spent talking amongst those at the same table to come up with questions. Each table is likely to have a committee member there who is wearing a nametag, and if anyone is not comfortable asking a question, they can write it on an index card and give it to a committee member who will stand up and ask the question.

### **Questions and Answers:**

Tanya will help facilitate the Q&A portion of the meeting. Anyone can ask a question that is on the topic of the Attendance Area Committee's work. Each person may ask one question, and then Tanya will circle around for another round. The next portion of the meeting will be reserved for comments.

**Q:** Do you anticipate the bus routes to be basically the same, except that the buses will end up at two different schools?

**A:** Tanya asked Rae Anne Thon, Transportation Director and committee member, to answer the question. Rae Anne stated that the bus routes would be very similar to current bus routes.

**Verbal Comment:** We are more than “nooks and crannies”. We have lost our school and are being relocated, and I don't appreciate where I live being called a nook and cranny. I have three children who are being displaced. 4<sup>th</sup> Street is cut in half, and all of our neighbors are going to Lowell, but my children will go to Happy Valley. The boundary on 4<sup>th</sup> Street should be changed to accommodate all families on 4<sup>th</sup> Street. I don't think it is fair or kind to rip children out of their school and neighborhood. Don't punish them further with the separation from their neighborhood friends. All children currently walking to Larrabee should be able to walk if they prefer. I would be happy for my children to attend Happy Valley if we lived closer. The Lowell bus travels up and down 4<sup>th</sup> Street twice a day. I encourage you to rethink this boundary.

**Q:** When the process was taking place to close Larrabee, the question was raised about what the opportunity would be for families to blue slip into other schools. I recall that Larrabee students would receive priority over other students. Has that changed?

**A:** Ron Cowan answered that throughout the process and going forward there is no change in the transfer process. Larrabee families can request a transfer into another school, but he does not recall that there was preferential treatment to be given to Larrabee students. Dr. Baker stated that he recalls conversations from last spring about extending transfer process deadlines last year for Larrabee families. Ron said that all families are welcome to request a school transfer, which is an annual process.

**Q:** What if there are more blue slips (transfer requests) than there is room?

**A:** Kate Baehr, Larrabee Principal, answered that there are criteria looked at, with childcare and number of years at a transfer school being a couple of considerations. Loss of enrollment this year was not due to blue slips.

**Q:** Regarding blue slips, several students are blue slipped into Happy Valley and Lowell right now. If a Larrabee student is trying to blue slip into one or the other, will they be competing with students who don't live near Happy Valley or Lowell?

**A:** Committee member Andy Robinson said that his understanding of the blue slip process is that principals get together to look at all of the transfer requests. Larrabee Principal Kate Baehr confirmed that, and said that the requests are looked at from year to year. Just because a student's transfer request is granted one year, does not mean they will automatically be granted the next year. Karen Tolliver, Happy Valley Principal, stated that every case is individual and reasons for the transfer need to be factored into consideration. Rob McElroy stated that there are currently students who have transferred to Lowell and Happy Valley via the transfer process that will need to reapply.

**Q:** Is there sufficient space for all Larrabee students at Happy Valley and Lowell?

**A:** Ron answered that, yes, there are about 130 students currently in Larrabee who will be accommodated at Lowell and Happy Valley next year, and there is space for these students between the two schools.

**Q:** When working with committee member Kim Brown of the City of Bellingham, it was determined that many students walk to Larrabee. Will all of the kids be bussed to Lowell? What is the school district doing between now and September, when Larrabee kids will go to Happy Valley and Lowell, to ensure better and safe school routes? Any there any attempts being made to accommodate a safe school route for walkers?

**A:** Tanya stated that Kim Brown is a member of the Attendance Area Committee, although she was not able to be here tonight. Ron Cowan stated that one bus currently serves Larrabee students. Students who live North of Harris cross Harris now to get to Larrabee, and students needing to cross Harris to get to Lowell will be able to do the same. Similarly, some students cross Donovan to get to Larrabee, so students could cross Donovan to get to Lowell. Students who live in the current Larrabee walk area will continue to walk to school. Rob contributed that one reason 21<sup>st</sup> Street was considered as a boundary is because of safe walking routes eliminating the need for students to cross 21<sup>st</sup> Street.

**Q:** What about kids who will cross the Parkway at 24<sup>th</sup> Street?

**A:** Ron answered that there is a pedestrian actuated crosswalk on the Parkway and other non-pedestrian actuated crosswalks as well. Maybe there is a perspective that they won't use that crossing. Another perspective is that the kids should be using the safe walking routes.

**Q:** Near Happy Valley, if you are going north towards the college, there should be a 4-way stop instead of a 2-way stop at 24<sup>th</sup> Street. It's the right thing to do.

**A:** Tanya stated that Kim Brown will be provided that suggestion at the next committee meeting.

**Q:** There is not a lighted crossing at 12<sup>th</sup> and Harris.

**A:** Actually there is a lighted crossing at 12<sup>th</sup> and Harris.

**Q:** My Larrabee 4<sup>th</sup> grader will go to Happy Valley next year. I would like more information about classroom sizes. Also, will teachers from Larrabee go to Lowell or Happy Valley?

**A:** Missy Ferguson, Lowell Principal, stated that there will be a lot of openings for teachers next year, and they will have places to go. There will be a process where teachers will be able to ask for their preference. Rob stated that, once it is known which students will be assigned to each school, staffing decisions will be made based upon enrollment, as they are at all 14 elementary schools each year. When additional students are assigned to a school additional teachers are allocated to the school.

There will be 7 schools that will have some boundary adjustments for 2014-15. Teachers will have the opportunity to request transfers.

**Q:** Can we get ballpark numbers on how class sizes look? Will small class sizes be considered, or will they be larger class sizes?

**A:** Rob stated it will depend on funding from the state. Class sizes at Happy Valley and Lowell will be similar to class sizes at all other elementary schools. Kate Baehr stated that the primary class sizes will look different. The district allowed some smaller primary class sizes for 2013-14 at Larrabee so we would not lose a staff member in our last year.

**Q:** Will there be enough room at both schools? Will there need to be more portables at Happy Valley while the new construction is going on? What if there is not enough room with new students coming in? What happens if schools are at capacity? Will students be displaced?

**A:** Ron shared that the proposed numbers at Happy Valley are 430. Karen Tolliver stated that Happy Valley has had over 500 students in past years, and Ron stated that he doesn't see Happy Valley approaching that number again. The projected enrollment for Lowell is 327, and that can be accommodated for a year, and there will be areas converted to classroom space once the new gym and cafeteria are built. Keep in mind that principals will have the ability to balance by accepting or not accepting blue slip transfers.

Tanya noted that some have provided comments already and asked that the group feel free to move from questions to comments at this time.

#### **Comments:**

**Comment:** In looking at the map, all of the kids who live on Chuckanut Drive and west of Chuckanut Drive should go to Lowell. When you get to Chuckanut Drive and Old Fairhaven Parkway, it is very close to Lowell, so those students going to Lowell would cut back on carbon emissions. It is important for kids who live on Chuckanut Drive and in a rural setting to build relationships at school since they don't have nearby neighbors. Chuckanut Drive is a pretty main route, and that might be a more logical divider than the way it jogs now.

**Comment:** I am passionate about loss of student and parent community. There are safety issues with the bus routes. When you walk near Hawthorne at the time that Fairhaven Middle School gets out, there is chaos and congestion. You have to see it at the busy times to get a true feel for it. Kids have to traverse Hawthorne with no stop lights or stop signs. There is a blind corner on Bayside which is extremely dangerous. Students would be better served if they ride the bus to Lowell – or to Happy Valley. It's not about the school, it's about the safety. Ron asked for and clarification about those areas on the map and it was clarified that Hawthorne should be used as a dividing line with students northwest of Hawthorne going to Lowell and students southeast of Hawthorne going to Happy Valley.

Tanya welcomed people to stay and ask more questions, but would like Rob to give next steps for the process.

Rob noted that the online survey will remain open through the weekend. The Attendance Area Committee will get back together on Jan. 21 to review input and feedback from the three school communities. At that meeting, the committee will review the commentary and questions from tonight, as well as responses to the survey. Our goal would be to submit a recommendation to Dr. Baker about

what the boundary adjustments ought to be by the end of January. Dr. Baker will then review all of the information, and make a final decision by the end of February so families can be informed what their school will be, prior to the blue slip process being put into place. The three principals - Kate, Missy and Karen - are planning transition activities, such as open houses, for students and families.

Rob thanked everyone for taking the time to participate in this input meeting, and adjourned the meeting at 7:35 p.m.