



MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendent Greg Baker

FROM: Steve Clarke, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, and Rob McElroy, Executive Administrator

RE: PreK-12 Attendance Area Standing Committee, Phase I Recommendation

DATE: March 9, 2017

We are pleased to present the following document that provides information on the PreK-12 Attendance Area Standing Committee process, describes how we have structured our work to respond to the different challenges, explains our rationale, describes our recommendation and outlines some next steps.

The document is organized in six sections:

- I. History, Context and Alignment with The Bellingham Promise
- II. The Charge, Challenges, Membership and Process
- III. Summary of Work
- IV. Phase One Recommendations
- V. Phase Two
- VI. Next Steps

I. History, Context and Alignment with the Bellingham Promise

Bellingham Public Schools current system of schools and attendance areas has evolved over the district's history. As population, birthrates, residential patterns and demographics have changed, so have the number and location of schools and the attendance areas for these schools. New schools might be needed in areas where numbers of students are increasing, and enrollment at certain schools might need to be rebalanced. The district has recently experienced growth in Whatcom County and at the city limits and has built new schools to service areas further to the north and east, such as Wade King and Cordata.

Recent school changes include opening of new elementary schools (Wade King, Cordata), closure of an elementary school (Larrabee), a new middle school (Kulshan), and a new high school (Squalicum). All of these larger changes have been processed by a committee representing the community, have sought and incorporated community input, and have been

guided by the Consideration Factors listed in the district's student attendance area policy 3130. Smaller changes, such as those that may be necessitated by opening a new road or the development of new land for housing, have followed a smaller process that engages with families/ community in the affected areas, principals of involved schools, and other district administration such as teaching and learning and transportation. The consideration factors are used with a particular emphasis on balancing student capacity at each school and feasibility.

Consideration Factors (extract from policy):

- Minimize disruption of student's established learning programs.
- Keep siblings in the same elementary, middle or high school, whenever possible.
- Provide overall balance of student enrollment related to facility size, taking into account future growth patterns.
- Provide a reasonably balanced socio-economic relationship in all schools.
- Provide the most efficient and feasible means for student transportation to and from school, including whether safe routes to school might exist, minimizing travel time and transportation costs.
- Keep neighborhoods together, whenever possible.
- Maintain feeder schools patterns so that elementary/middle/high school attendance areas coincide and students stay with the same cohort as they progress through school levels, whenever possible.
- Follow natural boundaries and utilize existing physical boundaries such as major roadways to delineate boundaries, whenever possible.

Under The Bellingham Promise, "We, as a community, make a collective commitment to Bellingham's children." One strategy for accomplishing this is the "One Schoolhouse" approach, whereby we strive for excellence in all of our schools and an equitable distribution of resources and services across schools. To do this, ideally, school enrollment is balanced across schools with no school enrolling more students than the number for which it was built and to ensure that schools are able to provide a wide range of course choices, schedules, and programs. More balance in the rate of students from different economic backgrounds, as measured by low-income families (low socio-economic status: SES), across schools is also important to ensure equity for students.

II. The Charge, Challenges, Membership and Process

The Charge

The superintendent charged the committee with "advising and recommend(ing) revised attendance areas." The group is not responsible for looking at changes to schools or programs, but might provide suggestions within the recommendations.

Challenges

Over the last 20 years, the population of the Bellingham growth area has grown by 39% to 93,940 in 2015 and it is anticipated to grow by another 33% over the next 20 years ([Bellingham City's 2015 Comprehensive Plan](#)). We do not anticipate that student enrollment in the public schools will grow at that level as the population ages. However, much of the future population growth is anticipated in the north end of the school district in areas that feed Cordata Elementary

and Squalicum High. During 2016-17, several new housing areas will open around Cordata with more developments planned for the ensuing years.

This growth in population in the north end poses two immediate challenges for the district. These immediate challenges comprise Phase 1 work of the committee and the content of this report and recommendation. Enrollment at Squalicum High has been growing, while enrollment at Bellingham High has decreased. Currently, Bellingham has approximately 245 fewer students than Squalicum which affects the courses and schedules available to students at that school; Squalicum will continue to see increased enrollment over the immediate and projected future. Enrollment at Cordata Elementary has also been growing and as of the current school year, the school is already almost fully enrolled. As a result, students moving into the Cordata attendance area after December who are living in a new complex (0.8 miles from the school) are being asked to enroll in another school.

While there are immediate challenges with managing the enrollment at Cordata and Squalicum, the district has a longer term need to balance enrollment across schools. Over the longer term, enrollment will continue to grow and capital investment, such as remodeling existing schools or building new schools, may result in increased school capacity. The Bellingham Promise also supports more balanced student demographics across all of our schools.

Accordingly, the superintendent's charge has been broken into two phases. A first phase to address immediate enrollment imbalances and space limitations during January – March 2017, which would be implemented in August 2017; followed by a second phase to more broadly rebalance schools across the district. In addressing the short-term challenge, one of our guiding principles was to be strategic: We wanted to address the short-term need by impacting as few families and students as possible to rebalance the schools identified in phase 1, while being consistent with the Consideration Factors and the goals of a long-term adjustment.

Committee Membership

The committee membership was solicited through email invitations, website postings, and word of mouth. The membership was drawn from a wide range of stakeholder groups and comprises the following:

- Micah Smith, Principal, Alderwood Elementary School
- Matt Whitten, Principal, Birchwood Elementary School
- Rachel Smith, Teacher, Birchwood Elementary School
- April Barker, Parent, Birchwood Elementary School
- Crystal Garcia, Parent, Columbia Elementary School
- Sharece Steinkamp, Assistant Principal, Cordata Elementary School
- Stephanie Horsfall, Teacher, Cordata Elementary School
- Emily O'Connor, Parent, Geneva Elementary School
- Andrea Quigley, Teacher, Lowell/Northern Heights Elementary Schools
- Mylo Allen, Principal, Parkview Elementary School
- Carrie Glimm, Parent, Roosevelt Elementary School
- Amy Terrell, Parent, Silver Beach Elementary School
- Lillian Harris, Office Assistant, Sunnyland Elementary School

- Eric Alexander, Parent, Wade King Elementary/Fairhaven Middle School
- Meagan Dawson, Principal, Kulshan Middle School
- Tommy Lingbloom, Teacher, Kulshan Middle School
- Brad Swanson, Parent, Shuksan Middle School
- Dustin Heaton, Teacher, Shuksan Middle School
- Alice-Marie Carr, Parent, Whatcom Middle/Squalicum High School
- Linda Miller, Principal, Bellingham High School
- Ben Goodwin, Teacher, Bellingham High School
- Umar Nadeem, Student, Bellingham High School
- Henry Brewster, Student, Sehome High School
- James Everett, Principal, Squalicum High School
- Paul Schissler, Community Member
- Rae Anne Thon, Director of Transportation
- Jessica Sankey, Director of Wellness
- Simone Sangster, Assistant Superintendent, Finance and Operations
- Bob Kuehl, Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources
- Ron Cowan, Executive Director of Capital Projects and School Facilities
- Isabel Meaker, Special Assistant to the Superintendent, Family Engagement
- Tanya Rowe, Executive Director, Communications and Community Relations
- Chris Behee, GIS Analyst, City of Bellingham
- Co-Chairs Assistant Superintendent Steve Clarke and Executive Director Rob McElroy

Phase I - Process

The committee met as a whole on: January 5, 12, 19, 26; February 2, 16 and March 2.

III. Summary of Work

The committee reflects a wide cross-section of local stakeholder groups encompassing all geographic areas, most schools, and the community. The group brought expertise and inquisitiveness to the issues related to schooling in Bellingham.

Overview

The committee approached the work in three distinct steps: learning, creating, and evaluating. The work was ultimately broken into two draft recommendations, one for elementary and one for high school, because these each have distinct attendance areas and to make sure input was received from these different student and parent groups.

Learning

The committee received presentations and reviewed data on the following topics:

- History and practices regarding attendance adjustments and changes.
- The district’s policy and consideration factors.
- Current enrollment at each school.
- Socio-economic characteristics of students in each school as measured by free and reduced meal status. This was supplemented by data on generalized home values throughout the city of Bellingham.

- Current and proposed housing developments in Bellingham and Whatcom County as received by the city and county. Not all of these have been permitted at this date; however, this provided information is indicative of the future development of housing.
- Current capacity at schools potentially affected by adjusting attendance areas.
- Status of current capital projects and planned future projects.
- Enrollment projections prepared by a demographer.

Throughout the process, committee members asked inquiry questions that dug deeper into the data and sometimes clarified issues by asking for new data.

Creating

The committee spent one working session creating possible attendance area adjustment scenarios. Several possible scenarios were developed for adjusting elementary attendance areas and several for adjusting high school attendance areas. Committee members were invited to join a smaller working group to examine these scenarios in detail. On January 25, 2017, a team of eight comprising Tommy Lingbloom, April Barker, Mylo Allen, James Everett, Chris Behee, Steve Clarke, Rob McElroy, and Simone Sangster met to examine scenarios and conditions developed by the committee. They shared their best thinking with the full committee, on January 26, for input.

Evaluating

The committee reviewed the small group draft recommendations and, ultimately, coalesced around a single draft recommendation for each of elementary and high school attendance areas. Applying the consideration factors resulted in several questions that were further researched by the district team, such as school capacity, program placement, and refinement of attendance areas for transportation purposes. The committee also wanted to learn more about receiving schools. The consideration factors yielded a rich discussion about enrollment challenges that also surfaced issues to be considered as part of the Phase 2 work of this committee.

The next step was obtaining input and feedback on the recommendations from school staff and parents. Since the elementary and high school recommendations are distinct, have an impact on different groups, and have different time sensitivity, the community feedback process was divided into two. In February, the committee solicited feedback on the high school recommendation, which was considered as a more immediate need with high school course registration opening in mid-February and closing in early March. This will be followed by a feedback process for elementary school in March.

The following process and timelines were followed to solicit feedback:

	High School	Elementary
Meet with school staff	February 3-15	February 13- March 2
Send email and letter communications with families	February 8-13	February 15-17
Meet with families – information and feedback session	February 15, evening	March 9, evening
Conduct Online Survey	Close February 16	Close March 10

	High School	Elementary
Submit recommendation to Dr. Baker	February 20-24	March 20-24
Additional processing time	As needed	As needed
Communicate decision	Early March?	Late March?

Evaluating the High School Attendance area draft recommendation

(a) Feedback

Feedback was received from 54 surveys received from parents/ guardians, students and staff, approximately 35 community members and families who attended the community meeting, and staff through the school staff meetings.

The following common themes were identified:

- Proximity to Bellingham is a plus - for transportation to school, involvement in afterschool activities, it is more a part of the local neighborhood.
- Concern about transition for current high school students - asking current freshmen, sophomores and juniors to change mid-high school is disruptive, where they already have friends, they have an established program, they understand and like the course offerings (eg. Advanced Placement courses) and are involved in athletics or activities at Squalicum.
- Concern about splitting the Shuksan 8th grade to two high schools and the number going to Bellingham being a relatively small cohort.
- Appreciate balancing the diversity of students in schools across the district.
- Concern about number of moves already - moving a group of students who have already moved several times during the construction of Birchwood and Cordata.
- Attendance area line questions - rationale for the northern (McLeod Road) and eastern (Bennett Road) boundaries.
- Transportation and transfer process questions – clarification of who will be eligible to remain at Squalicum and the transportation that will be available to them.

(b) Committee Evaluation

The committee dedicated a meeting to identifying major themes in the feedback and discussing how these influenced their thinking on the draft recommendation. These are summarized above. Several of the issues, related to welcoming students to a new school and extending course offerings, were identified as issues for school administrators to address. The committee discussed the transfer process for current high school students and siblings who might want to stay at Squalicum and was concerned about whether transportation would be available to these students; the availability of transportation was considered an equity issue.

The committee made the recommendation presented below; however, the recommendation was accompanied by several suggestions that reflected the concerns discussed.

Evaluating the Elementary School Attendance area draft proposal

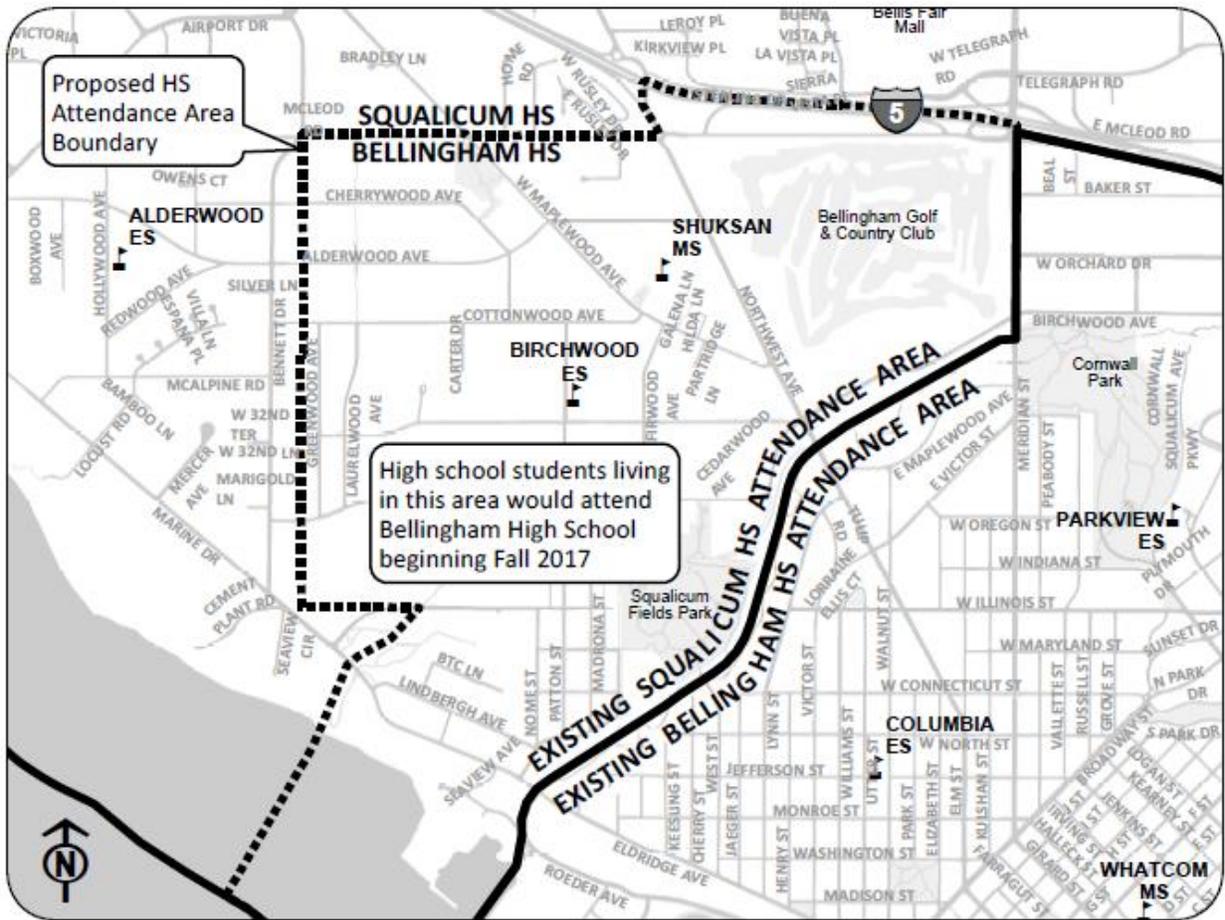
Given that this proposal is still in process, this section will be added in March as an appendix to this document.

IV. Phase One Recommendations

High School Attendance area draft recommendation

The committee is recommending the following to the superintendent:

1. Approve one high school attendance area adjustment associated with the Birchwood Elementary area, as described in the map below. Based on current enrollment, student address information and grade level, moving students in the Birchwood elementary attendance area south of I-5, could mean an increase in Bellingham enrollment of 132 and increase in percentage of free and reduced price lunch students from 27% to 30%, and a decrease of 132 students and reduction in free and reduced meal percentage from 38% to 36% at Squalicum.



2. Allow current juniors who live in the area to finish their senior year at Squalicum, transfer request required.
3. Current freshmen and sophomores who live in this area would attend Bellingham High for their sophomore through senior year. They may make a transfer request for consideration by March 15, 2017.
4. Current Shuksan families with 8th graders and future high school students who live in this area would attend Bellingham High School.
5. Students who have siblings who will be Squalicum seniors next year may choose to submit a transfer request to remain at or attend Squalicum.

6. For those requesting a transfer to remain at Squalicum, school bus transportation would not be provided. Students may/ may not be able to access a bus to Squalicum from a nearby neighborhood stop, depending on how many empty seats are available per the courtesy busing guidelines in procedure 6600. Priority for bus transportation will be given to 2017-18 seniors.

The committee makes these recommendations with the following suggestions:

1. Continue to evaluate availability of transportation – identify satellite busing options for students.
2. Communicate that this is the first step in a larger discussion of attendance areas that will likely many families and schools across the district.

These recommendations were arrived at through a consensus model with the recommendation receiving full support at our last meeting on March 2, 2017.

V. Phase Two

Phase Two of the attendance area process will entail a broader examination of growth and future projected enrollment patterns across the district as a whole. During Phase 1, the committee identified the following issues for attention during Phase 2:

- (a) Middle school feeder patterns;
- (b) Consider Sehome High school as part of future rebalancing; and
- (c) Greater focus on balancing demographics throughout the district's schools.

The committee will work in coordination with a consultant, who is reviewing school facilities, and a future Capital Facilities Planning Task Force recommendation for future school facilities.

VI. Next Steps

These recommendations will be presented to Dr. Baker by mid-March for his review and consideration. He may decide to accept the recommendations, do further outreach, and/ or make changes. The co-chairs, Rob McElroy and Steve Clarke, as well as the entire committee, are available for any clarifying or follow-up questions.

Thanks to the group for their work on behalf of Bellingham Public Schools.