



School community/neighborhood meetings

Steve Clarke, assistant superintendent and Jay Jordan, executive director of teaching and learning, co-chairs of the [Attendance Areas PreK-12 Standing Committee](#), were invited to several PTA/school parent group meetings between Nov. 2018 and Jan. 2019. Other committee members, including principals and parent representatives, attended these meetings to hear families' questions, wonders and concerns.

- Silver Beach PTO meeting on Nov. 13, 2018
- Columbia CPA meeting on Dec. 7, 2018
- Parkview PTO meeting on January 8, 2019
- Regency Park Complex on Jan. 31, 2019
- Columbia Neighborhood Association Feb. 19, 2019
- Silver Beach Elementary on Feb. 25, 2019

Jay and Steve would share the following information about the committee, its scope and the district's history of changing attendance areas/boundaries for schools.

Scope of the Attendance Areas PreK-12 Standing Committee process

- The committee is still early in the process and doesn't yet have a formal scenario for families to react to. It is in the early stages of gathering input from parents.
- Part of the intention of the meeting is to help describe how boundary changes and change process are important and sometimes messy and challenging.
- They want to hear and listen to all Bellingham Public Schools families and are willing to meet individually if requested. Families will have more opportunities to give input in the future, too.
- The draft scenarios on the website are likely not the ones the committee will end up recommending to the superintendent. The committee isn't at a place yet to bring concrete scenarios forward for deeper discussion.

Historical Context and Process

- Described the history and some of the goals of the district's boundary work at the high, middle and elementary levels from back when there were only two high schools in Bellingham.
- Recently, this committee equalized discrepancies in enrollment between Squalicum and Bellingham. Cordata and Parkview enrollment were also balanced out during the last iteration of the attendance area work in (2016-17).
- They shared that the district works very closely with the city to discover where the growth is happening and that the significant growth in the northern part of the city makes it necessary for this committee to remain active as this growth puts pressure on the numbers in our northern schools, especially Shuksan Middle School. The committee's initial focus was middle school boundaries.
- Another positive aspect of the attendance area work is the replacement of three elementary schools: Alderwood, Sunnyland and Parkview. These new schools can accommodate a larger capacity of students.
- Trying to make the boundary changes at the elementary and middle school levels at the same time is complicated.

How the Committee Operates and Current Status

- The goal is to include a wide variety of committee members: Teachers, parents, staff and community members.



- The committee meets monthly (not in December) and minutes are posted on the web site.
- They discuss and refine the best way to gather feedback.
- The committee will ultimately make a recommendation to the superintendent.
- Initially the committee started with four scenarios and then that grew to eight. Recently new scenarios have been submitted. In between the committee meetings, a sub-committee meets to try to refine what the committee has discussed.

Themes/ questions and answers from all meetings (see school-specific comments below)

Q: When you make a recommendation who makes the final call and when is your goal for the recommendation?

A: The committee's recommendation will go to the superintendent. We are hoping that some of these boundary changes will go into effect by fall 2020, but some may be later to coincide with the opening of the new elementary schools.

Q: What are your priorities that guide your work?

A: Policy 3130 guides the work. <http://bellingshamschools.org/policies/3130-policy/>

These factors are considered when making attendance area recommendations. No one factor is more important over the other. At the same time, this is an opportunity for us to make a change to make our schools more equitable and balanced.

Q: Are you going to consider moving kids already in middle school?

A: Most recently the district has tried to honor grandfathering. When we made boundary changes between Squalicum and Bellingham, we allowed juniors and seniors to stay at Squalicum, but freshman and sophomores in the new Bellingham boundary were expected to attend Bellingham. While the committee isn't responsible for how a school welcomes new students and makes the transition positive, this is part of their discussion.

Q: How does the role of proximity to a school play a part in the boundary decision? What if we are closer to one school, could we possibly end up at another?

A: There are cases where proximity sometimes doesn't make sense. Example: An example of houses nearer to Bellingham High School but students attend Sehome High School. The goal is to find natural boundaries.

Q: What does the school district or city do about walking or riding a bike to school to help make it safer for kids?

A: We have our people within the district that think of the walking and biking trails and we partner with others too. The district has the Routes to School committee that is working on safe riding and walking to school. If parents had an interest in being a part of this work, we would engage them and work to improve our walk/bike routes.

Q: When will the scenarios be less preliminary?

A: We are wrestling with the scenarios that are right for our families. Hoping by the end of the school year.

Q: I feel strongly about keeping the school together. I want my friends to go with a strong cohort of kids they feel comfortable with. I feel like middle school is a tricky time – making friends with kids and parents is different at middle school than elementary.

A: If it's in the best scenario, we'd like to not split elementary schools – IF there's a way to do it. Personal connections are important. We take that seriously in our system.



Q: At what point does your household become eligible for bus service?

A: Generally, when you are a mile away from school. There are exceptions, for example, if a child's school is on the opposite side of Interstate-five and there is no safe walk route.

Themes specific to Silver Beach (Nov. 13, 2018)

- Transportation issues and length and timing of bus travel. Shuksan is too far for Silver Beach families who live on Northshore.
- Please fix split between Whatcom and Kulshan (right now small number of Silver Beach kids attend Kulshan. Most attend Whatcom).
- Silver Beach's enrollment is too big; interest in changing boundaries to get some relief.
- Acknowledgment that splitting can seem hard, but examples of kids doing really well in middle school despite splitting from elementary friends.

Themes specific to Columbia

- Proximity to Whatcom Middle School for walking/biking reason.
- Columbia neighborhood feels a close relationship to Whatcom and wants kids to stay there.
- A desire to stay at the school with the safest and closest route.
- If we move middle schools, do not split Columbia; keep us together.

Themes specific to Parkview

- Strong interest to keep Parkview going to Whatcom. "I bought my house for the walkability/bikeability to school."
- Differing opinions on whether Meridian or Northwest were safer/better for kids commuting. Which is safer: quiet road or busy street? Can we get crossing guards?
- Appreciation for the hard work and focus around equity. Our schools should be more diverse. Proud to live in a community that prioritizes equity.
- For those who live in downtown Bellingham, it is hard to find a safe walk through town to get to Whatcom Middle School. Happy to hear about bus routes. Southside/Lowell might be better.

Themes specific to Regency Park

- Want to stay at Kulshan because closer, easier for kids and families to walk to.
- Would the district offer an after-school activities bus at Fairhaven?
- Is it fair for families who have fewer resources to go to a school much farther away?
- Would Fairhaven be welcoming to a more diverse student population?

Themes specific to Columbia Neighborhood Association

- It's important to have supports for students who are attending a new school.
- Wonder/question about the diversity of the attendance area committee and those offering input.
- Neighbors' concerns that kids going to Shuksan will "decrease our home value" demonstrate white privilege.
- We create an inclusive community by welcoming people to our community; we are a stronger community because of diversity.

Themes specific to Silver Beach (Feb. 25, 2019)

- Wonders about safe walking routes (sidewalks, crosswalks, lights, etc.) to Northern Heights vs. Silver Beach. Currently students walk via trail to Silver Beach.
- Strong interest to keep Silver Beach students at Kulshan and Whatcom due to proximity. Concerns that Shuksan will add 15-20 minutes to students' who ride the bus.



- Would the district consider building a fifth middle school?
- Changing elementary and middle school boundaries means a lot of disruption to families.
- Concerns from some residents that if they leave Silver Beach, they could become disconnected or isolated due to proximity of neighborhood.