



Attendance Areas PreK-12 Standing Committee

May 23, 2019
3:30 - 5:00 p.m.

Welcome

Co-Chair Jay Jordan, Executive Director, Department of Teaching and Learning, welcomed the committee members and provided an overview of today's agenda.

Introductions

Wellness director Jessica Sankey and safety program specialist Nyla Thursday introduced themselves.

Review Objectives

Jay reviewed the committee's objectives and norms. Today the goal is to land on an option to recommend to the superintendent.

Approve May 9, 2019 meeting minutes

Jay asked that committee members review the minutes from the May 9, 2019 meeting. A motion was made by committee member Sharece Steinkamp to approve the minutes as written and committee member Tommy Lingbloom seconded that motion and there was a unanimous vote to approve.

Review Community Meeting Feedback and Survey Results

Co-chairs Jay and Steve Clarke, Assistant Superintendent, gave an update on the feedback from the community meetings. Four public meetings were held on May 13, May 14 and May 15. Parents/guardians and community members in attendance were given the opportunity to provide feedback.

In response to transportation concerns expressed from Columbia families, a few committee members spent an evening exploring biking and walking options between Columbia and Shuksan. We don't have a system for choosing bike routes; we help identify "routes to school," which are walking routes that may be used as biking routes (in most cases).

Nyla shared a map that shows the three routes taken by committee members at peak traffic time, 5 to 6 p.m. She shared her experience walking and biking these routes on this evening and other times of the day. She said car and bike traffic fluctuates based on time of day, as does foot traffic, the number of people on the trails and in/around Squalicum Park. Based on the committee members experience biking and walking during peak traffic, it could take approximately 10 to 20 minutes to walk or bike from Columbia to Shuksan or from Shuksan to Columbia.

Nyla said there are pros and cons comparing Columbia to Whatcom vs. Shuksan. Routes to Whatcom have many uncontrolled intersections, while for some families, Shuksan will be farther. There are improved streets and bike lanes on Maplewood near Shuksan.

The committee talked about how they heard concerns that adults ride bikes differently than children. Other committee members mentioned that it really depends on the child and their parent to make the determination what is an appropriate route. Nyla mentioned that [Whatcom Smart Trips](#) has offered to work with us on

identifying routes to school. The committee thanked Nyla and Jessica for their input and help in processing these options.

Committee members reflected on the community meetings the week of May 13 and how powerful they were. Jay and Steve thanked the committee members for their attendance and involvement. Steve said he was proud of this team and what he saw at the meetings, that committee members were really listening to parents, hearing their concerns and helping explain our rationale. [Summary of feedback from community meetings](#).

The following is what committee members heard at the meetings.

May 13 at Columbia Elementary

An estimated 40-50 parents/community members attended the meeting at Columbia. Some expressed frustrations that they hadn't been heard regarding transportation issue. Biking and walking uncertainty are central to this community, and some expressed transportation concerns and had questions about busing and the transportation budget. Committee members commented that under either scenario, our middle schools will have different demographics, including Whatcom.

May 13 at Silver Beach Elementary

An estimated 100 parents/community members attended the meeting at Silver Beach. Committee members said they heard a "Silver Beach against Columbia" perception. They also heard support for option 1 because in that scenario, both the Silver Beach and Columbia communities would experience change as opposed to just one community "getting hit twice." Community members also talked about how the growth in the north end of Bellingham may impact traffic congestion, especially on Sunset Avenue, and that option 2 may be problematic with that lens. Some parents/guardians were unaware that the school district could change school boundaries, and they assumed that when they bought their house in that neighborhood, they would attend that school.

May 14 at Whatcom Middle School

Seven parents/community members attended the meeting at Whatcom. Most attendees expressed an understanding and even positive for the purpose of adjusting boundaries and many had wonders about the proposal.

May 15 at Kulshan Middle School

Three parents/community members attended the meeting at Kulshan. They liked the percentages of the elementary splits to middle schools. Some expressed concerns about transportation to Kulshan.

Survey Feedback

The Attendance Areas PreK-12 Standing Committee shared two draft options of attendance area adjustments with families on May 6, 2019. Information, a survey and a map of the proposed boundary adjustments were posted online and emailed to all families. A total of 374 people took the survey. Committee members spent time reviewing the [summary of school boundary survey](#).

Executive Director, Communications and Community Relations, Jackie Brawley shared that we utilize surveys, along with a number of other feedback strategies, to receive input on new initiatives and system changes.

The following are comments from the committee about the outreach and survey results:

- Privilege is the voice from the survey. There is a concern that we aren't hearing from all our families.
- The Department of Family Engagement reached out to Regency Park Apartment families through phone calls and a text with the link for the survey. Some families expressed some ambivalence to the potential move; they don't feel Regency Park will be their permanent home. Many are looking at their current living situation as temporary and plan to move as soon as they can. People overall like their neighborhood schools.

- It is important to provide transportation support for students to get to and from whatever school they are attending, especially those who want to participate in after school activities.
- There is an interest in creative bridge building / integrating families into a new school.
- When we land on an option, part of the process is to list the reasons why we support that option and also what we need for Dr. Baker to know in the recommendation.

Review maps for option 1 and option 2

Jay asked the committee to spend a few minutes looking at the two final options brought forward.

Process decision

Steve asked the committee to participate in a line activity to give a visual of support for the option they believe is the best option for now and potentially in the future. Committee members stood on a continuum line; option 1 on one end and option 2 on the other.

Almost all committee members were on the option 1 side with two members in the middle and one on the option 2 side.

Committee members engaged in discussion and asked each other questions as to why they are standing where they were on the continuum.

Steve reminded members that we strive for consensus, and he wondered if we can walk out of this room supporting what we feel is the best option.

Recommendation

Jay asked for voting to take place with a showing of thumb up, thumb sideways or thumb down to see if there was agreement to eliminate one scenario. A sideways thumb indicates support for the option with questions that still need to be addressed. Thumb down would mean we have more work to do. The committee voted and option 1 received 100% support.

The committee members shared out the following:

option 1:

- I like the stability of these boundaries over time and into the future.
- The two options each provided better balance in free and reduced lunch numbers. However, I felt that option 1 was the only option that provided for permanent, lasting change. I worried that the gains we made in balance via option 2 could easily disappear with future adjustments 10 years down the road as our city continues to grow.
- Anticipating the direction of growth in our city, I believe that option 1 paves the way for simpler and smaller and smaller adjustments in the future. In other words, it feels like a down payment on minimizing future disruption.
- Option 1 provides less disruptive for Silver Beach in making an elementary move, but not middle school.
- There is more room for future growth.
- Option 1 sets Shuksan up for better long-term stability as the north side of town changes and also down the road when/if fifth middle school is needed.
- The bike routes shown by Nyla make sense and a starting point to address the concerns of the Columbia families.
- Knowing where residential growth is happening now and will continue for the next few decades, the move for Columbia from Whatcom to Shuksan would have been inevitable at some point. Making the Columbia to Shuksan move sooner means less future disruption and sets things up better for when either a fifth middle school, or a remodeled middle school with more capacity comes online (Whatcom is the only middle school with no expansion potential given its property size/restrictions).

- Moving Columbia to Shuksan creates a larger cohort of middle school students that move from Shuksan to Bellingham High (Birchwood and Columbia together for both middle and high school).
- Columbia neighborhood is closer to Shuksan than Tweed Twenty is to Shuksan.
- The elementary splits are better in option 1.
- The walk and bike routes from Columbia to Shuksan are a reasonable distance, well-lit and seem like they would be safe for most families.

Next steps

We will post a preliminary update on the committee website and share that we have selected option 1, specifically for the middle school boundaries. We will share which details the final recommendation will cover, including the timeline, phasing in, 'grandfathering,' and transportation.

A subcommittee will come together and work on some of the tweaks, particularly in the elementary boundaries. Then we'll get together as a full group so we can submit the recommendation to Dr. Baker before or near the last day of school.

Steve and Jay thanked the committee for all their hard work.