

South Lyon Community Schools
Elementary Closing & Redistricting Committee
March 9, 2010 - Minutes
6:30 p.m. Millennium Middle School

Committee Members Present:

Bartlett Elementary Parents – Amy Chait, Amy Schams
Brummer Elementary Parents – Annemarie Holthus, Robin Riha
Dolsen Elementary Parent – Marilyn Jarrett, Donna Condra
Hardy Elementary Parents – Kim Plohetski, Karen Reeds
Kent Lake Elementary Parent – Linda Hannah, Russ Averill
Salem Elementary Parents – David Ascher, Tamara Fulkerson
Sayre Elementary Parents – Lesley Butler, Mona Pearson
Assistant Superintendent for Administrative Services – Melissa Baker
Director of Operations – Mike Casey
Bartlett Elementary Principal – Stacy Cooper
Sayre Elementary Principal – Jennifer Murphy

Committee Members Absent:

None

Note Taker:

Karen Wiater – Data Processor/Operations Department

Reminders for the Committee

Melissa Baker reminded the Committee that the meeting next Tuesday, March 16th would be held at Centennial Middle school in the cafeteria at 6:30 p.m. She also reiterated to the committee that the temporary closure of either Dolsen or Salem does not mean one year, it means a time period such as four to six years. She reminded everyone that the last redistricting was six years ago and this is not something to be done on a yearly basis. Melissa also reminded the Committee that the goal is to have the recommendation to the Board by April 1st. There will be a Special Board Meeting held on April 12th at 7:00 p.m. at Millennium Middle School to discuss the committee's recommendation, then a regularly scheduled Board meeting on April 19th at 7:15 p.m. also at Millennium Middle School, where the recommendation will be an action item for the Board. The committee members are asked to attend both meetings.

Review Board of Education Charge and Guiding Principles

Melissa Baker reviewed the ***Charge and Guiding Principles*** for the Committee.

Public Comments

Melissa Baker reviewed the following:

This is an opportunity for public comments. Please remember that this committee is only addressing the charge as established by the Board of Education.

Public comments should be limited to three minutes in length, and we ask that individuals honor that, so that our committee can do the work that we need to do.

We will listen to all public comments; however, committee members are not expected to enter into a dialogue. Once public comments are over, the communication is between committee members only and we will not be responding to the audience or interacting with the audience.

Amy Ponsock – A Nichwaugh Lake Estates resident provided a hand out to the committee that the residents of Nichwaugh Lake Estates and Evergreen Pond created to show their thoughts and concerns related to the proposed temporary closing of Dolsen which could result in the redistricting of their subdivision to Salem Elementary School.

Jeff Vollmer – A Hunters Creek resident who's subdivision has been redistricted four times since his family has lived there. He is concerned for his daughter who will be redistricted for her 5th grade year, and then have to change schools again in 6th grade when she goes to middle school. He feels that this redistricting goes against everything that has been stated about affecting as few students as possible and feels there should be more consideration for the younger, elementary students. His family was there when Hardy was established and would like his daughter to remain at Hardy Elementary.

Jennifer Petrovitch – Stated to the committee that she feels Salem should remain open and why she feels it makes better sense financially, socio-economically and capacity wise. She feels more money would have to be spent in maintaining Dolsen if Salem were closed and that money would be better spent on students and resources. She feels Dolsen is an older school and has had fewer updates than Salem and that transportation costs would increase as there are more students who walk to Salem than walk to Dolsen. She feels that Dolsen is in more of a commercial area making it more attractive to sell and the money made by selling Dolsen could be used to build the new school on 11 mile. She feels Salem being in a rural area makes it more socio-economically balanced and it is the unique center of the community. She feels that the children of Salem already feel removed by the distance. She feels Dolsen students could be more easily dispersed to other schools and Salem could accommodate more children and would not have to be redistricted as she feels Dolsen would in the future.

Brad Ward – A parent residing in the Heights at Elkow Farms expressed his concern that his subdivision would be redistricted to Dolsen if Salem closes. He said his neighborhood is struggling to sell homes as it is and a selling point is that the kids from that neighborhood go to Hardy Elementary, which is a beautiful school and has high test scores. He is concerned that moving these students to Dolsen which has a below the state average in test scores will reduce property values. He is also concerned with the congested traffic in the Dolsen area and that cut-through traffic will only increase. He feels Salem elementary should remain open as it is the only elementary school south of Nine Mile Road with its athletic fields and unique learning opportunities such as Johnsons Creek.

Stacie Hinote – A resident of the Merrie Meadow, Trebor area who is concerned as she is not in a subdivision, but in an area of dirt roads and not many houses. Realizing the goal is to move the least number of students she doesn't understand why the 30 students in her area must be affected. She feels that moving these students to a late start school will create an unnecessary overtime situation for the

bus driver of those kids. She feels the “Green” option is a better option which still leaves room for growth.

Vickie Redington – A Nichwagh Lake Estates resident stated her main concern with redistricting her subdivision to Salem is the distance. She feels that an hour drive is terrible for any age, but especially for an elementary student. She feels with all the focus on the guiding principles, Salem would clearly be the best choice for closure as fewer kids would be affected, transportation costs would be less and the socio-economic equity would be met.

Kristen Bowman – A Nichwagh Lake Estates resident thanked the committee for looking at the handout fellow resident Amy Ponsock provided to them. She stated that cost was the main reason for the redistricting and the focus needed to be on affecting the least amount of kids possible meaning the least amount of subdivisions, thus decreasing home values and the damage that would happen to the community. She said the least amount of damage needed to occur and closing Salem would clearly provide the District with the least effect on the kids and provided the bigger savings.

Connie Kivisto – A parent representing Hardy elementary, residing in Hunters Creek subdivision for almost 11 years stated her concern about her subdivision being moved three times already. She said whether it is Salem or Dolsen to close, her subdivision is slated to move and she was appalled to find that hers was the only subdivision being redistricted to Sayre. She feels Sayre is a wonderful elementary school, but her motivation comes from being redistricted so many times already. She realizes kids are good at adjusting, but feels enough is enough in regard to her subdivision. She also stated that she doesn’t feel it is right to pull her kids out of Hardy and then allow School of Choice kids to attend Hardy. She stated that Hunters Creek is the only subdivision out of Hardy that pays city (not township) taxes.

Kristy Person – A Nichwagh Lake Estates parent asked the committee to consider the long term consequences of the students if they are redistricted to Salem. She stated her concern with the hour long bus ride and then to have to do homework too.

Heidi Lukowski – A Nichwagh Lake Estates resident stated she understood this was a tough decision, but the guiding principles should be followed. She feels that fewer students would be affected by closing Salem, the transportation costs would be lower, and there would still be room for growth.

Scott Hilden – A resident of Deer Creek subdivision and parent of a 5th grader stated that his subdivision is very small and most of the kids are grown up and have moved on. He feels that moving his 5th grade daughter away from her friends would be traumatizing for her, as his subdivision is one mile from Kent Lake and others farther away will still be attending Kent Lake. He feels that since there is no growth in South Lyon now, there are no issues with space and to move just a few kids from a small area like this is more traumatizing than moving kids in larger areas.

Mark Enfroy – A Nichwagh Lake Estates resident stated that the New Hudson area will grow more than the Salem area and the committee should look seriously before closing Dolsen. He feels that if Dolsen is closed we will have to look at redistricting again as Kent Lake and Hardy are reaching capacity. He stated that his subdivision is the farthest away from Salem and if it is Dolsen that closes he would like the committee to consider a move to Sayre or Bartlett which are closer. He said the reason his family moved to this subdivision was the close proximity of the school.

Mike Diaz – A Hunters Creek subdivision resident and a Hardy elementary parent stated his concern with what he feels is a disproportional impact on his subdivision. He asked the committee to take into consideration the history of moves his subdivision has made already.

Elaine Braun – A Salem resident and long time volunteer at Salem Elementary, member of the SIP, and Salem Events Committee member spoke of her love for Salem school and the rural atmosphere. She said that it's not just a school, it's a family which includes a super principal who has taken the school "off the charts", and marvelous teachers. She stated that Salem elementary school is one of only two schools in the state who hold an Emerald Certificate. She feels if Dolsen is renovated, the cost would be huge and as far as the sewer cost at Salem, it will have to be paid through 2016, so there is no way out.

Lori Schamp – A Merrie Meadow and Trebor area resident who feels that moving the 30 students from Kent Lake and redistricting them to two different schools is unnecessary as there is no potential for growth in this area which consists of private roads and only 2-3 children per road. She feels these children should be considered, not the future children, and leaving these 30 would not put the school over capacity. She is concerned that moving these students from Kent Lake, the smallest of all the moves, will isolate them from their friends, teachers, principal, and alienate them further.

Greg Schamp – A Merrie Meadow and Trebor area resident – had to leave the meeting before he could present his comment.

Email Communications for the Committee

Melissa Baker provided Email communications to the committee that were received from the community with request that they be given to the committee.

Requested Information

Melissa Baker provided the committee with a list of Questions received from committee and community members during the last week along with answers. She explained that although some questions were not relevant to the committee's guidelines, they wanted to provide the answers to all of the questions as they appreciate the committee's and community's involvement and questions.

Committee Discussion

Will we open a new school before opening the closed school?

No, at this time we believe the old school will open before building a new one.

Will we be selling either school?

No, this is a temporary closure.

Is the 80% number based on classrooms or student heads?

As shown in the models, there were 133 classrooms District-wide with a target of 100 classrooms.

The 100 classrooms were spread to the remaining schools; 2605 students divided by 100 classrooms equal 26.1 students per classroom at an average. There are still classrooms left and all schools are filled at close to 80%. The percentage is higher at schools where there is less potential for growth.

Committee Review of Models

A model was sent in by a committee member for review. It was called "A Blend of Administration's Salem Recommendation #1 and the "Green" Recommendation from 2-9-10." (Note: it was clarified that "Green" refers to the green paper the model was submitted on.)

This model includes an "island" and "subdivision hopping" and if only numbers were to be considered, these things could work. Transportation effectiveness would not be achieved in doing this. Neighborhoods may also be pitted against other neighborhoods.

This model shows the Salem Central Boundary being moved to Bartlett which could potentially impact the socio-economic equity at Bartlett with a much larger percentage than expected. We will look at the guiding principles and work with Linda Welch.

Continued Committee Discussion

What happens when enrollment picks up?

All the models allow for growth. Remember this is a temporary closing, if we need to re-open a school, it doesn't mean everything goes back to the same, it means another redistricting which will be based on where the growth is and other parameters as established by the Board

A committee member stated the following after her review during the week with the guiding principles-The socio-economic equity from both models meet the goal. Considering as few boundary changes as possible – Dolsen would move Dolsen students plus nine additional areas (517), Salem would move Salem plus 6 areas (256) which is a huge difference. Students with a different start time would be 566 from Dolsen, versus 214 from Salem which is a huge difference. Overall, looking at the Dolsen model compared to Salem, Dolsen has more neighborhoods, and the transportation cost would be more cost effective in closing Salem. Both models did leave room for growth. It is quite obvious, the numbers tell it all. I would go with the Salem option.

In response a committee member stated- I think we need more playing with the boundaries. I'm not going to listen to this dog and pony show with what's been given by administration and make my decision.

Melissa Baker stated that this has not been a dog and pony show. She explained that they had started first with building the models, as the committee had requested. The technology of VersaTrans makes this possible. She said the model that was presented today by a committee member was fantastic, and that Mr. Casey was sharing realistic concerns. Melissa stated that the guiding principles are to affect the least number of students as possible. She said she didn't know if subdivision hopping would be cost effective for transportation and these are things this committee needed to discuss. Melissa explained that they had a deadline of April 1st and could add meetings if the committee needed more time.

A committee member responded- I think we need to make a decision as a committee if we are going to jump over neighborhoods. Not everyone is going to be happy, and if this was going to be an easy decision, the administration would not have involved us at all. I feel if we open one can of worms, it creates ten more. Where do you draw the line? We want the best for everyone based on the goals and the guiding principles. We haven't gone through it enough to make a decision yet, so we need to think about it more. Everything we say will get picked apart. I'm not opposed to looking at anything but we need to decide as a committee.

Is there a similar jump for the Dolsen model that we can look at so we can compare apples to apples?

We have not considered islands or subdivision jumping. We can look at different options.

Melissa Baker explained that when Centennial was an elementary, before Kent Lake and Brummer were newly opened, the Redistricting Committee at that time, and then supported by the Board and the Superintendent worked to get rid of islands and worked to be consistent. She spoke of a little area that just didn't make sense and from that point forward boundaries really started to be built without those islands.

But that wasn't a temporary close. Couldn't we just move those coming from the school we are closing?

It will take about 10 minutes more to go through that part of Pontiac Trail in the morning.

Are there any other committee's studies that have created jumps and allowed islands that we could look at?

If you look throughout the state, you could find that they've done everything.

Are there any particular studies comparing transportation costs or proving it's best to keep the students as close as possible?

Not that we are aware of.

If we agree to create islands and jump subdivisions, the whole thing will open up. We need to think of the pros and cons. Can you make a list of pro's and con's for the next meeting?

Yes, we can do that. The committee can email your thoughts in on pro's and con's also.

We have to start making a decision. We don't want to hurt feelings. We need to come to an agreement on creating islands and jumping subdivisions and then look at the models. Pros and cons will help us, but we need to make a decision soon and then start tweaking.

Because this decision affects every elementary school in the District, will the administration be discussing transitional plans with both the students and the staff? Students will be in school through June and we don't want to distract teachers. Will the bumping process be talked about with the teachers? Kids can sense adult stress. I don't want Salem to close, but if it does, I'm

excited for my daughter to go to school with other kids and meet new people. It's how you present it to your kids.

This is so important. We all know that change has to happen. It is the parental responsibility to present it to our kids in a positive way. If we talk to them about how upsetting it is, it will affect the kids negatively. Don't present it to your kids as a negative.

Melissa Baker stated that we have great teachers, principals, and parents at all of the buildings and we need to keep stating and sharing this. Everyone will be welcome at all of our schools.

Can community members being redistricted look at the schools their kids will be going to?

The principals are good at touring with the parents. We will also have transitional plans. Another suggestion for parents is to attend springtime concerts or other activities in the schools. Activity dates are listed in the South Lyon Herald and you are welcome to come check out the schools.

When the School Board votes, will they be using the same guiding principles that we are using.

The charge was given to our committee by the Board and we will be presenting from the charge and how the decision supports the guiding principles. We can't say what the Board will do, but they are waiting for our recommendation.

How will our decision be presented to the Board?

We hope the committee will be there both evenings. The Board will want to thank you because they know how hard you are working. We will have an information packet and then a Power Point presentation for the Board and Audience.

When a school closes then opens back up, how will the process work?

Most likely like the process in place now with a committee and a Charge provided by the Board.

The committee discussed whether they should begin by looking at the pros and cons of creating islands within boundaries at the next meeting.

Melissa Baker asked the committee if they would like to look at a list of pros and cons that Mr. Casey would put together as a next step.

Decision: Yes. Fist to 5 – consensus reached.

Next Steps

Committee members can email their thoughts for pros and cons to Mr. Casey at caseym@slcs.us

Mr. Casey will put together a pros and cons list for the committee to review next week.

Future Meeting Dates

Tuesday, March 16, 2010 at 6:30 p.m. – Centennial Middle School Team Room/Cafeteria

Tuesday, March 23, 2010 at 6:30 p.m. – Centennial Middle School Team Room/Cafeteria

Tuesday, March 30, 2010 at 6:30 p.m. – Centennial Middle School Team Room/Cafeteria

All meetings are open to the public and there will be a time for public comments at the beginning of each meeting.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.