

Anchorage School District  
Anchorage, Alaska

Summary of Public Hearing on New South Anchorage High School Boundaries  
Goldenview Middle School  
February 13, 2003

The first of three Public Hearings to discuss boundaries for the New South Anchorage High School (NSAHS) took place on Thursday, February 13, 2003 at Goldenview Middle School. Approximately 100 people attended. Mr. Mike Henry, Director of High School education began the meeting at 7:00 p.m. He welcomed parents that were in attendance and explained that the reason for this meeting is to listen to public testimony and also to clarify any misinformation that may exist in the community. He shared that the final decision for these boundaries had not yet happened and that the district is interested in hearing what the public has to say about the possible scenarios presented.

He then discussed that a task force was formed to develop possible scenarios for the NSAHS. The task force was appointed by the Superintendent and included parents, students and principals from East, West, Dimond and Service High Schools, representatives from Special Education, the Minority Education Concerns Committee, Anchorage School District (ASD) Transportation and the ASD Demographer. Mr. Henry explained that the task force was guided by the ASD policy 444.1 and considered the capacity of each school as well as the ethnic balance, geographic boundaries, the distance to schools, and future growth projections in determining the possible scenarios.

He explained the task force discovered that in three to five years, there could be 200 – 400 additional high school students in the area. He shared the remodeling of Dimond High School will leave it with a capacity of 1600 students. The NSAHS will also have a capacity of 1600 students, while Service High School will remain at a capacity of 2070 students. The projection is that by the fall of 2004, in all of south Anchorage there will be 4,929 high school students. The combined capacity of the schools compared to the projection leaves room for about 341 students in the area. He stated that the goal of the task force then became to assign students to the three high schools in the area according to school capacity and projections.

The ASD Demographer identified the geographic areas and estimated the number of high school students in each of the “pockets”. The task force then developed scenarios involving the areas currently assigned to the Dimond and Service High Schools. It was determined that currently the student populations at East and West High Schools are over crowded and that their boundaries would not be affected in the boundaries for the NSAHS. The task force then looked at possibilities and selected two possible scenarios to present to the public.

Mr. Henry described the geographic boundaries of the two scenarios, the projected enrollments and capacity of each school. He introduced Ophelia Dargan-Steed the ASD

Demographer who spoke briefly on the demographics that were considered in developing the scenarios.

Mr. Henry then invited the public to present their testimony, suggested that comments should be kept to about three minutes each person in order to allow everyone time to speak. The parents were invited to the additional Public Hearings next week on Tuesday, February 18 at Hanshew Middle School, and Thursday, February 20 at Mears Middle School. He shared that comments will be summarized, studied by the task force and then all would be forwarded to the Superintendent who will then make a recommendation to the School Board. He shared that the public will also have the opportunity to speak to the School Board during their meetings on March 3 and March 10, 2003.

A summary of public comments follows:

MB parent in Goldenview Middle school area shared that he felt changing the boundaries will also change the continuity of the children's education. He said the proposed boundary causes small pockets to be severed from friends these students have had for many years. He explained that he felt the middle school years are very formative years and that students develop deep relationships during this time and to change the boundaries would interfere with their education and social development. He said he would like to see the boundary drawn back to North of Huffman to the Goldenview boundary which would then include the pocket of about 20 students who would be affected by this change.

TM parent in Goldenview Middle and Bear Valley Elementary school areas shared that both scenario A and B seem to draw heavily on geographic locations but do not take current school boundaries into consideration. Students who have attended school together since elementary school would then be attending different high schools. He shared that the concern of parents with students going into high school is to give them the best possible tools to be successful. Peers are part of that support and we need to not ignore a pocket of about 13 students that would be cut out in these boundaries and added that it would be only one more bus stop for a minimal number of students. He feels the boundary should be redrawn to coordinate with the existing elementary and middle school boundaries.

LS parent in Dimond High and Bayshore Elementary school areas said she was pleased in the way her request for information was handled. She shared that they would like to remain in the Dimond area as they are only two miles away with only one major road to cross. She shared that both scenario A and B increase bus rides for a number of students, the distance also prevent students from riding bikes or walking to school. She said that in regard to safety and the proximity of the school, both scenarios have students crossing three major roadways creating hazardous conditions. She said the Dimond community has been invited to participate in the considerations for the new Dimond High and that she feels the other two high schools should all be considered in this decision. She said that there is a pocket of students in the East boundary that thought they would be re-zoned to the Service area after that school was built and including them would be

responsible. She added that program needs, optional programs, etc might also need to be relocated and that the entire analysis should be studied further.

JR parent in Mears Middle and Bayshore Elementary school areas shared their desire to remain within the Dimond High boundary. She said that she agrees with all the previous speaker had said and that if she had to support either scenario, it would be scenario A. She shared she felt it made the best sense in regard to proximity to the school and the disruption it would cause. She said that at least with scenario A there would not be three major roads to cross as in scenario B and that with future growth further disruption could include relocatables for overcrowded schools and that scenario provides a fresh start in a new school. She said she felt that the entire process should be re-opened and studied further.

MP parent in Dimond High, Mears Middle, Bayshore Elementary school areas shared that the task force has chosen scenario A and B because the funding for busing comes from the state and not the ASD. She said that by placing the new high school where it is the district was creating more bus time and that another proposal should be worked out after the new School Board members and Mayor are elected.

TC parent in Dimond High and Bayshore Elementary school areas said he felt that 45 minute bus rides seem excessive and that if students are involved in extracurricular activities there are more safety concerns involved. He asked the audience to raise hands in preference of either scenario A or B; he then said that he felt that neither of the scenarios would work. He shared that it is up to the parents in this community to see to the safety of the students. He asked about information going home regarding this and stated he had just received this letter and that with a decision coming up March 10 he feels that there has not been enough time to come up with alternative plans, He said that he requests a delay and that the decision on these boundaries needs to be postponed.

JH parent in Goldenview Middle and Huffman Elementary school areas said that currently they are within a fifteen minute walk to the new school and only have one busy street to cross. He said that it is 45 minutes to Service and three major roads to cross he added that this is similar for many neighborhoods in the Dimond attendance area. He shared that he felt the consistency of friendships is important for after school activities as well and that within these boundary changes there are a small number of students who have gone to Huffman together and will attend Goldenview together and then would be split to different high schools.

MG parent in Bayshore Elementary school area said that when the bond for the new Dimond High school came up a few years ago that folks in the Dimond/Bayshore area were excited about their students being able to look forward to attending that school. He said that in these scenarios, the same students will be bused for 45 minutes each way to and from school. He said that he feels motives were misplaced when Bayshore residents were told they would be attending the new Dimond High, only having to cross one major road when now they will be bused for 45 minutes.

BV parent in Dimond High and Bayshore school areas shared that he was troubled by the minutes of the task force meeting that he had gotten from the ASD website. He said that in total, all the meetings of the task force amount to 7 1/2 hours total. He said that he did not feel a decision affecting so many people can be determined in that small amount of time. He said that there were fourteen members on the task force but that the slides show sixteen individuals were involved, he added that he guessed the area not represented was most likely the Dimond/Klatt area.

JD parent in Dimond High school area said that two years ago after seventeen days in school his kindergartner was affected by a change in staff and the move to a newly created classroom. He was told at the time that parents had no control over that situation and now we have no control in keeping open spots available in Dimond while we will move. He said that he did not understand if the new school is not to open till the fall of 2004 and the new principal will not be selected till July, with mascots, school colors and naming the school taking place after that why the boundary decisions should be made as early as this March. He said he felt more time should be put into studying the boundaries.

CA parent in Goldenview Middle and Bear Valley Elementary school areas congratulated the task force on their work to come up with the two scenarios. He said that moving to a school forty minutes away when they are two blocks from Dimond High School is nuts. He said that if a different scenario is not determined then he would not support scenario A. He said that scenario B is preferred as it would allow students to continue to go to school with friends from their elementary school. He added that including his wife and three children there would be five votes for scenario B.

GH parent in Goldenview Middle school area said that he is only ten minutes away from the new school. He added that Scenario B would allow students to attend the new school but does not take into consideration the neighbors north of Huffman who would go to a different school. He shared that his daughter goes to school early to participate in jazz band then participates in cross country skiing and soccer after school. He said his daughter told him that she did not want to add a 45 minute buss ride onto her schedule. He explained that the distance has a huge impact in families especially in regard to extra-curricular activities.

CE parent in Goldenview Middle school area said the current Middle School boundaries should be the model for setting up the boundary for the new high school. She shared that in the Huffman area they are seven minutes away from the new school and yet they would be 45 minutes away from Service High School. She asked that consideration be given to keeping friends in neighborhoods together.

JM parent in Goldenview Middle and Bear Valley Elementary school areas explained that they live just north of Huffman. She pointed out specific areas on the map of scenario B and explained that Alaterna road deadends and then there is a creek and that there is a small group in that area who will have attended Bear Valley and Goldenview together that would then be split to different high schools. She asked why the task force had not

considered the Bear Valley area in the process of selecting these scenarios. She said that scenario B clearly isolates students who have been together throughout the rest of their educational years.

BL parent in unknown area from questioned what rules for zone exceptions will be involved after this process. He said that he felt that many solutions for pockets of isolated neighborhoods could be addressed by a public discussion of zone exception policies.

EL parent in Bayshore Elementary school area shared that the way the scenarios are drawn that Dimond would be the only high school where the middle school did not reside in the same boundaries. He felt that this did not make sense in planning. He said he understands that the downsizing of Dimond also plays a role in this but that we need to look more carefully at the boundaries to solve issues in the Southport and Bayshore areas.

RD parent in Bayshore Elementary school area said that Dimond High students come 100% from Mears Middle school, 100% from Girdwood and 19% from Goldenview Middle school areas and the rest of the students are from Polaris and Stellar. She asked what determines capacity and shared that she knows that square footage plays a role in determining capacity. She also asked if distance or mileage is taken into consideration when drawing the boundary lines. She said she had also read that in regard to transportation that changing school start time slightly to accommodate busing these distance may also have to be considered. She suggested adding more buses. She said that in the task force meeting minutes that there are three scenarios discussed, scenario 1, 2 and 3 and now the task force is presenting scenario A and B. She said she felt that neither of these scenarios consider future growth. She said that the #2 scenario talked about in the minutes was declined because of the development that may happen in the gravel pit. She said she doesn't understand how all three high schools can claim that there is room for growth when they are all at 90+% of capacity and there is new growth all around the south Anchorage area. She said that she does not understand the demographics and cautioned that it would be bad to make a hasty decision and then have to revisit this again in five years.

PP parent in Bayshore Elementary school area said that they currently live within 100 yards of Mears Middle school but that neither of these scenarios work. He said he understands the hard work of the task force and that he does not envy their job. He urged that forty minute bus rides back and forth to school takes up quality family time. He said that the Mears population is made up of students from Kincaid, Chinook, Sand Lake, Bayshore and Klatt and that these students would then be split into different high schools. He said that he would like to see the students in Middle and High school stay together.

TB parent in Service High and Huffman Elementary school areas explained that she has a sister who was on the task force and that she knows that many more than 7 1/2 hours were put into this process by each of the task force members. She said that she knows that the task force considered the fact that this will split students who attended schools together but that there is no other way to effectively move both schools to their 1600 student capacities. She urged parents to continue to get involved as the parents on the

task force have done. She shared that the task force had a very difficult job but that they had to look at neighborhoods to move and keep as many together as possible.

MS parent in Mears Middle School area said that although she applauds the ideas of getting involved that the last speaker stated she added that parents did not know that this was happening. She said that there was not communication that a task force was being formed and there was no invitation to be on the task force. She shared that this should have been communicated to all and all should have been asked to participate. She said she is curious about the numbers as they don't appear to be valid. She said that if 2500 square feet is the size of the school why is the capacity only set at 1600 students it would seem they each have a lot of room. She also asked why Service was at a capacity of 2070 students and questioned why it seemed so unequal.

SS eighth grade student from Goldenview Middle School shared that she resides in pocket 3. She said that a 45 minute ride to Service High or to the new school is not fair. She felt that in scenario B the split in the Ocean View area would send some students to the new high school and about 30-40 students that would go to Service. She said she agreed that 7 1/2 hours is not enough time to study these boundaries and feels there should have been representation from each pocket on the task force.

BO parent in Bear Valley Elementary school area shared that they live on Cox Drive on the Hillside and that he was bused 1 1/2 hours each way when he grew up and that he knows that bus time is not a positive experience. He said that he would support scenario B as there is time saved on the bus. He said that less time on the bus also lessens environmental impact. He added that there will be some winners and some losers in this process no matter what is decided. He said that he favors scenario B as it keeps more neighborhoods in tact and reduces bus time for students.

CL parent stated she grew up in Iowa and that if a student lived more than two miles from school they rode the bus otherwise they walked. She said that she would like to see these boundaries be redrawn with a different approach. She suggested taking a current map and drawing circles 1, 2 and 3 miles out, etc. This would give consideration to friends in current neighborhoods as well. She also said that she is concerned about the traffic flow with parents traveling not only to schools but to work and after school activities. She asked the task force to re-think the scenarios using a different format.

PJ parent in the Dimond High, Mears Middle and Klatt Elementary school areas said that she wasn't aware of the task force being formed and she works for the Anchorage School District. She said that she lives in the Dimond attendance area and that even though some might have thought they might be going to the new south Anchorage High School, no one thought they would be moving their children to Service High School. She said that she is volunteering to be on the new task force to re-drawing these scenarios.

BV parent spoke earlier as well and added that this task force was also news to him. He said that from the minutes he has been reading that it does not appear that the task force took into consideration the distance to the schools. He said that in the meeting on

December 4, 2002 that the principal from East High made a motion that East and West be excluded from the boundary discussions, this motion was seconded and then accepted without any discussion by task force members. He said that in one set of minutes a representative from ASD transportation stated that additional buses increase the cost and that it is not good to bus through one boundary in order to get to another boundary. He said that many people have purchased their dream homes in this area in order to establish themselves in a neighborhood and to provide continuity for their children's education. He said that he feels it is unacceptable to bus students so far away. He added that he will fight this to the end and hopes that many parents join him in doing so.

PP parent in Dimond High, Mears Middle and Bayshore Elementary school areas commented that he felt the current bond proposal for a new ASD administration building is probably on the table to give the administrators a shorter ride to work. He said that the scenarios do not work and that he is currently two miles from Dimond High and that he would be 25 miles away from the other schools.

SC parent in Service High, Goldenview Middle and Bear Valley Elementary school areas shared that her son goes to Service now and has a 45 minute bus ride. She said that she felt that it is important to consider the elementary and middle feeder schools in determining the new high school boundaries. She said that she was involved on the design committee for the new high school and that is where it was determined that a high school with a capacity of 1600 students is better. She said that the one thing is that all should know that in the end Anchorage will have three very good high schools in the south Anchorage area.

RD parent spoke previously but wanted to add that communication between home and school needs to be improved. She said she may not read a lot of things, but that she always reads the school newsletters and that last week the newsletter from Mears is where she learned of this task force. She felt that schools need to upgrade their communication.

At this point, no more of the audience wished to testify, Mr. Henry thanked the audience for their attendance. He reminded them of the Public Hearings next week on Tuesday, February 18 at Hanshew Middle School at 7:00 p.m. and Thursday, February 20 at Mears Middle School at 7:00 p.m. as well as the dates for the School Board hearings.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 8:35 p.m.