

Anchorage School District
Anchorage, Alaska

Summary of Public Hearing on New South Anchorage High School Boundaries
Hanshew Middle School
February 18, 2003

The second of three Public Hearings to discuss boundaries for the New South Anchorage High School (NSAHS) took place on Thursday, February 18, 2003 at Hanshew Middle School. Approximately 80 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.

Mr. Henry 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.

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 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:

VJ – This is the fourth time they have dealt with boundary changes. She has a major concern with the s.w. corner of Lore Road and Abbot Loop Road. There is an elementary pocket that has been moved several times. This pocket has approximately 11-15 kids. These kids were moved to the East High School district. They were to be moved back to Service High. We need to consider the old boundaries of Service High School and take into consideration the boundaries of East and West high schools.

CP – Bayshore/West resident. Has a senior and a freshman at Dimond High School. Their family moved to Bayshore because of the neighborhood. They are very involved in the schools. They currently live 5 minutes from Dimond. If the boundaries change her daughter in her junior/senior year, will be attending the new school. She feels the rest of the city was not considered. Dick Traini said when they were talking about the Eagle River high school that you cannot consider the Anchorage bowl in segments. You have to consider the city as a whole. She suggests that we start over and consider East and West high areas. She recommends that the district give the community the time they need to provide a resolution that will fit for everyone. We would like an extension so we don't feel we are pressured to find a resolution by March 10.

TM - Has two children in ASD. One student is at Bear Valley the other at Goldenview. They live in a small pocket in what is identified on the map as pocket 13. They are on the border of where Goldenview is and two blocks of where scenario B will cut them out from attending the new school. His concern is that the current middle school boundaries have been ignored in both of the scenarios. It is important for him to know whom his kids are associated with. His peers are going to be some of the most important support group. By using the existing boundaries in sending 98% of his friends to the new high school, with this small pocket ignored his kids will be sent to Service. He urges the task force to take a look at a modification of the boundaries to extend from Huffman Rd up to the existing boundary of Little Campbell Creek. It is a geographical area that would do less of an impact on the district.

T.C. - Lives in the Bayshore/Dimond area. Have two girls that would be impacted with this decision for about 7 years. We are within walking distance to Dimond. Under either scenario they would have to be bussed 45 min. He understands that the task force had a difficult decision. His problem is with the process. The March 10 deadline doesn't allow enough time. The School Board elections are in April. He would like to be able to lobby

to the School Board. Three board members will be replaced. It makes more sense to have a board look at these things that they will be held accountable for. His concern is that we need time to understand the decision the task force made. If the decision goes forward there is going to be outraged parents. We need to come up with alternative solutions. We have asked for answers and have asked for demographic data. Two meetings have taken place. By the third meeting we might have that information. How can we analyze this and make comments on how these decisions were made? There is no time for that. Asked the community how many people feel there should be a third option. How many people feel we need more time? How many people feel this should happen after the board elections. It looks unanimous to all three questions. Would like to suggest that the remaining people who speak to state that we need more time. He would like to have enough time to analyze the information that is going to impact his family for 7 years. He does not think it should happen until September 1.

E. L. – Has two children in the Bayshore/Dimond district. As we listen to people speak we need to look at the entire city. Trailside and Kasuum area has been shifted to the East district. There are people who are in the Service area that would prefer to go to the new high school. We have a lot of people who would prefer to go to Dimond. We have a main feeder middle school to Dimond that is surrounded by elementary aged children who are going to be bussed to a high school on the hill. That scenario does not make a lot of sense. Mears middle school is practically connected to the Bayshore Elementary school property. It doesn't make sense that these children go to these schools then be bussed to high school on the hillside. He would agree that there is not enough time to analyze the demographic data and figure out where population pockets are. A lot of other demographic data has been broken down. There has not been enough analysis done as to how those areas could be shifted to accommodate the middle school boundaries as a better basis to feed into a high school. The September timeline looks better to analyze this data.

M.J. – Parent at Kasuum. Our kids have always gone to Service High. East high was supposed to be a short-fix until the new south side school opens. Scenario A or B is not acceptable. She would like to add Kasuum back in to the Service district to see how that brings their numbers up. She agrees that there is no way to make a decision in the next couple of weeks. Kasuum needs to be considered. We need more time to make these decisions.

J.J. – We were on the task force for the Kasuum boundary. We were promised when the new school was open the students would be switched back. It is recommended that there be an option "C". Send the Bayshore kids to Dimond. Send the Kasuum kids to Service. This will alleviate overcrowding. We live two miles from Service. We have to drive five miles to East. The school isn't going to open for over a year. Why does there need to be a quick decision? Listen to the taxpayers? The District is looking for a vote for a new school, and a new administration building.

M.G. - We live in the Bayshore area. Bayshore is the only boundary that has been aced out of their high school area. Several years ago at a PTA meeting the community was

urged to vote on the new high school. We thought our students were going to go to the new high school. An hour and a half on a bus is too much wasted time. We need to put off the boundaries until we reach a decision.

S.M. – Kasuum Elementary parent. He has watched the adjustment for high school boundaries change over the years. The city has tried to adjust the overcrowding. With the new high school being built it would offset the overcrowding. When the boundary changes were done many parents were upset with the results as many students were suddenly changed to a new high school. Students were moved far outside of their district. This was to be a temporary change. When the new high school was open the community would be switched back to Service High School. The boundaries that have been brought to community for approval are unacceptable. The students will be bussed long distances. The new Dimond and the new high school only holds between 500 & 700 fewer students than the existing Dimond high school and the other high schools in the district. This is a problem. Schools should not be getting smaller with the rate the city is growing. Moving students at two of the high schools and leaving a 10% enrollment seems excessive and satisfies only a small percentage of the entire school district's needs. There are currently other high schools at capacity or above capacity. There is no consideration to alleviate their population problems. With the current scenario a small group of students will attend Hanshew for the next two years. Tight bonds are formed at the junior high level. After two years, this group of students will be separated to their core group of peers and moved to different high schools. It seems ridiculous for students who live 7 minutes away from a high school to be bussed 45 minutes away from their neighborhoods to East High. All after school activities require parents to pick up their children. Student's time is already spent on homework, extra-curricular activities and work. Time spent on busses going through high traffic intersections would be detrimental to the student's academic careers as well as adding an additional danger to their travel time. She recommends that the task force find other proposed boundaries. ASD wants us all to become involved in their school and education. But by moving so many children away from their schools you are accomplishing the opposite. The growth is not only to the south; it is to the east and to the west. You need to take these other neighborhoods into consideration. We need more time to come up with another option. The middle school boundaries need to be considered. Breaking a small group of students up in the middle school and moving them to a different high school is not going to be beneficial in the long run.

S.O. – Bayshore/Dimond parent. Concerned that the first decision made by the task force was to restrict the re-zone or boundaries to just the three schools and not including all of the schools. She is concerned about the distance. Most of the people in Bayshore are two-earner families. We drop our students off at school on our way to work. This will not be an option. We would have to get up earlier. It is particularly true for students who are involved in extra-curricular activities. A swimming pool is not in the building design for the new south Anchorage High School. Her student cannot ride the bus with her instrument because it is too large to take on the bus. This means that she will have to be dropped off and picked up. The loss of sleep is a big concern. A student going from a nurturing middle school to a large high school is very stressful. It appears that Mears will

be split up between a minimum of three high schools. Strongly urge the task force to delay the decision. They have been working on only certain areas of the city, not the whole city. Would suggest that the decision wait until the beginning or early summer.

K.L. – Dimond parent. Asked where the letters were mailed. Mr. Henry responded that 12,000 letters were mailed out to every family in the south Anchorage area for all three levels. A lot of people didn't know anything about it. She lives 1.6 miles from the school, versus 6 miles. Has anyone looked at a traffic study? The general public has not known about this for very long. She would recommend that a notice of any upcoming meetings be placed in the schools. She suggested that a format be made putting the junior high and high schools together. With the distance that will have to be driven, the schools will not get the adult volunteers they currently have. We need more time. Why do we need to make a decision so soon? How far back can we push this and still get new scenarios and new ideas?

R.O. – Bayshore parent. Concerned that the Kasuum families have been through four boundary changes. We need an open process now to satisfy the concerns the community has. We need to rationalize all boundaries, not just south Anchorage. Concerned about traffic and time – student drivers. Concerned with Mears being divided between three schools. Asking for a delay. The whole city has concerns.

F.S. – Bayshore/Dimond parent. It is not an easy process. We need better information to make a better decision.

1 – proximity – geographic. Can be addressed in a more efficient way.

2 – safety – why bus 45 minutes when 15 minutes would do?

3 – community – want to keep in tact. We need to look at other options. Need to look at other high school boundaries. Just looking at south Anchorage has tied our hands. We need to look at the optional programs. Need to look at program needs. These all need to be addressed. We need more time. An October date looks best. Wait until school is in session and things have settled down. Wait until the School Board elections are over. Eagle River high school is a factor

C.B. – Has lived in the Dimond area for 20 years. We need a 3rd scenario. Neither proposal meets these needs. Need to look at the small group at Campbell. In one scenario they are shipped to Service High School. Service will be going through their renovation. The Dimond community knows these kids. Throw both boundaries out and start over. He anticipates a huge turnout at Mears on Thursday. Any of the proposed scenarios will take his kids out of the community. We need School Board members and people who can make a decision. Slow down. Give information to the community. Give the chance to have input

D.W. – In two years he will have three kids in high school. He agrees with the Bayshore people. It's not that far to take students to Dimond High School games. If he has to drive to the hillside they won't go. Bayshore is getting the brunt. It will be a sacrifice and a burden. To drive seven miles is ridiculous. Let's not rush through it. We need more time and more information.

P.H. – live in pocket 11. She lives .7 miles to the new high school. With scenario B, her kids will not be able to attend the new school. This will impact them. There will be more busses, more traffic on Elmore Road. The Bayshore kids should be able to attend Dimond. We need more time to come up with scenario C. She has been able to obtain zone exceptions to keep her kids with their peers. We need to look out for each other. We need to make changes and have more time. Need to look at pocket 11.

K.B. – single parent in the Bayshore community. Her kids attend Dimond, Mears and Bayshore. She moved there because she wanted her children to attend those schools. Please reconsider changes. She is in favor of the October date.

S.A. – Moved to the Hanshaw and Service High School area. She agrees with the Kasuun parents. Bayshore kids should attend Dimond. She agrees with the radius idea. Does not make sense to bus kids seven miles when they live a mile away. We know the students, we know the parents. You will take the students away from their safety net. These proposals will not work for people. The October 1 deadline looks good.

John Steiner, School Board member – We get to help make the decisions and have to listen to everything and weigh everything. These are legitimate concerns. Most of the time when we re having a new school, folks want to attend the new school. Old Dimond High School has a larger capacity then the new Dimond facility. The new Dimond is a better academic environment. I have heard a lot of very good comments. I am listening and the other School Board members will be listening.

Mr. Henry adjourned the meeting at 8:17 pm