

TO: City Council

FROM: David J. Deutsch
City Manager

SUBJECT: City Council Policy on Pending School Boundary Changes

DATE: December 3, 2009

In an effort to address overcrowding at and underutilization of elementary and middle schools, the Prince George's County School System has embarked on a comprehensive review of school boundaries. Phase 2 of that process is underway and includes schools in the Bowie area. The proposed boundary changes for Bowie area schools are summarized below:

- Whitehall Elementary (-137 to Kenilworth)
Kenilworth Elementary (+137 from Whitehall)
- Northview Elementary (-137 to Pointer Ridge)
Pointer Ridge Elementary (-79 to Perrywood, +137 from Northview)
- Rockledge Elementary (-119 to Yorktown)
Yorktown Elementary (+119 from Rockledge)
- Benjamin Tasker Middle
(-212 to Everett Just and Kettering, +138 from Ogle)
Samuel Ogle Middle (-138 to Tasker)

The School System held a preliminary hearing on the boundary change process at Bowie High on October 20th to solicit input in formulating its proposal. Another hearing was held on November 16th in Bowie after the proposal was announced to allow parents and other concerned stakeholders to express their opinions on the proposal. Additional boundary review meetings were held around the County, with the final one taking place on December 1st, to gather further input before a decision is rendered by the Board of Education.

According to Schools Superintendent Hite, the timetable for adoption of the Phase 2 Boundary Proposals will be determined by the Board of Education and is expected to take place in the near future, possibly before the end of December.

While acknowledging that there are schools within Bowie that are severely overcrowded and there are others that are not being fully utilized, and that some balancing of school populations is necessary, staff recommends that any changes requested by the City Council should be made in accordance with the following guidelines:

- Wherever possible, community schools must be maintained. The fabric of our community, and in fact any community, is strengthened by children going to school with their neighbors. This sense of community also encourages parents, neighbors and local business to support local schools.
- Students should be assigned to the school closest to their home.
- Boundary changes should be logical and should attempt to keep Bowie residents at schools within the City.
- Students with two years remaining in elementary school (fourth and fifth graders) should be allowed to remain at their current school, rather than being moved because of a boundary change. Siblings of those students should also be allowed to remain at their existing school, if that is their preference.
- Middle school changes should be phased in so that students do not have to change schools during their three years in middle school. A middle school student who was in elementary school last year, might attend Samuel Ogle Middle School this school year, then be reassigned to Benjamin Tasker next year, would attend Belair Annex in 9th grade and Bowie High in 10th grade, attending a total of five schools in six years.
- Avoid moving students more than once during their elementary school years. If a second boundary change is necessary, allow those students who have already been reassigned once during the elementary school years the option of remaining in the school they are attending.
- Boundaries that allow for the maximum number of walkers should be encouraged.
- Boundary changes must not disrupt the schools to the point that they affect the high level of education taking place within the buildings.

Staff is examining the boundary change proposal for Bowie area schools and will soon provide Council with details on the specific neighborhoods affected by the changes. Council can then evaluate the boundary changes, using the above guidelines, to recommend possible changes to the Board of Education.

Recommendation: Adopt the proposed School Boundary Change Guidelines as outlined above.