

REDISTRICTING FAQ  
January 21, 2010

This site is presented to address some of the frequently asked questions from the special meeting to discuss the proposed redistricting plan and from email received by the school committee and superintendent.

The goal of the special school committee meeting was to allow as many speakers as possible to raise questions and concerns so that all may be considered. While many important questions were raised, time did not permit explanation or discussion of many of these concerns. We seek here to address common issues raised by parents.

## **THE NEED FOR REDISTRICTING**

### ***1. Why is the Sudbury Public Schools proposing redistricting at this time?***

The Sudbury Public Schools provide high quality education in a cost-effective manner. Our district's expenditures per pupil are significantly lower than those in other high-performing school districts. Nonetheless, we must continue to strive to improve the education while making the most effective use of the taxpayer's investment in the district. Increasing cost constraints and expectations for improved performance make this imperative. As we do so, each student deserves an equitable opportunity for an excellent education.

The varying sizes of the populations of the four elementary schools make efficient resource allocation challenging. This problem is exacerbated by the current boundary lines, which provide an imbalance of students relative to the school building sizes. Enrollment projections indicate the gap in school enrollments will increase in coming years, especially the gap between Haynes and the larger schools. While the building sizes prevent an equal distribution of students, adjustment of the school populations would provide for more effective and efficient use of our limited resources.

We believe that a student's opportunity to obtain a quality education – including the individualized instruction more often available in a smaller class, additional help in learning to read, or attention to a particular need such as a medical or emotional need – should not vary significantly from school to school in Sudbury.

### ***2. What benefits and efficiencies would redistricting provide and how might this result in greater parity for students in the elementary schools?***

In developing the plan, the benefits, including efficiencies, costs savings and greater parity, were assessed along with the known associated costs. One might argue that, individually, a single benefit would not exceed the associated costs. However, we believe that collectively, the benefits—educational, operational, and financial—are compelling enough to make the argument that the plan should go forward at this time.

We recognize there are costs and that the proposed changes would be difficult for some. We are sensitive to the disruption and necessary transition for the students who move from one school to another. Accordingly, if the plan is approved, we fully intend to mitigate the impact as much as possible through a comprehensive, student-centered orientation and transition program. Also, understanding that students will be moving from one excellent school to another excellent school helped us in our decision making.

The following are brief discussions of our reasoning concerning examples of the benefits, efficiencies, operational improvements and greater parity that we believe would be gained from the proposed redistricting plan.

- Haynes is considerably lower enrolled than the other three schools and the projections are for the gap to grow. Our long-standing mission has been to provide a similar educational experience for all students in town regardless of where they may live. The plan closes the gap.
- The varying school sizes can lead to inequities in several ways. When the grades in one school are significantly smaller than in other schools, it is more difficult to even out class sizes. The smaller grade enrollments at Haynes (mid-30s to mid-60s) as currently projected for the next several years provide challenges to creating sections of similar size to those at other schools. The chart below reflects the enrollment by grade at each school for the current school year.

	HDK	FDK	1	2	3	4	5	Gd K-8
<b>HAYNES</b>								
Act Enroll 09-10	27	20	43	61	68	69	85	373
<b>LORING</b>								
Act Enroll 09-10	31	60	114	94	98	89	100	586
<b>NIXON</b>								
Act Enroll 09-10	18	37	66	88	92	68	96	465
<b>NOYES</b>								
Act Enroll 09-10	54	40	103	110	106	103	120	636

- For example, how should a grade of roughly 36 students be split into classes? Should there be one class of 36 students or two smaller classes of 18? What if classes in the same grade level are significantly larger than 18 in the other schools? This challenge becomes more acute if staffing is reduced.

- Larger grades allow for more equity in class sizes across the schools. The schools would make better use of our resources with more even class sizes, not only in assigning classroom teachers, but also in allocating other staff such as teaching assistants.
- If a school has few sections at a grade level, e.g. only two, the staff have difficulty making effective student placements, separating students when appropriate or matching students with a teacher with an appropriate teaching style for the student. The plan would help address this issue.
- In the small school (e.g. enrollment of 375), students are known well by all staff and administrators. This occurs at the larger schools (e.g. enrollment of 600) but not to the same degree.
- The transition from 5<sup>th</sup> grade to middle school is somewhat of a larger adjustment when a student's experience is in a grade level of 70 students and a school of 375. Students who have spent their elementary years in a grade level of 100 students and a school of 650 often find moving to the middle school where the grade level is 350 and the school is 1050 less threatening.
- Also from a teaching perspective, much work in planning and developing instruction happens in grade level teams. When a grade level is limited to two teachers, the energy and creative levels are more limited than when the team includes 4-5 teachers. This impacts teaching and learning.
- Smaller grade sizes result in inefficiencies also in scheduling specialist (art, music, PE, language and library) sections. Moreover, the elementary schools find advantages to scheduling common core learning times (such as a common math block). This allows for more effective teaming and flexible grouping of students with similar learning needs across classes. With larger grade sizes, we can make more effective use of our resources as deployed throughout the building.
- Smaller school sizes also lead to inequities in providing other services. In particular, functions that are typically provided by one staff member per school vary by the size of the school. Examples include services or classes provided by nurses, counselors, psychologists, literacy specialists and tutors, speech and language specialists, co-curricular specialist teachers, and librarians. For example, the nurse at Noyes provides services to individual students (such as dispensing medication or monitoring insulin levels), as needed, for approximately 648 students while the Haynes nurse provides such services for approximately 424 students.

Smaller schools are also allocated more part-time staff. For example, the school psychologist, counselor, PE, language and music teachers at Haynes are less than full-time and some travel to another school to teach. This creates scheduling issues for the school and means that if an issue arises within the building when these staff members are not present, others have to temporarily address the issue or put it on hold until a later time.

There are certain fixed tasks that are required within a school regardless of the size of the school and the enrollment. Supervision duties, covering classrooms when other teachers may be in a meeting, serving on curriculum and school improvement committees, etc. are relatively constant across the schools. A smaller enrolled school, with fewer full-time (and more part-time) staff, find addressing these assignments more difficult, have less flexibility to meet the demands, and find a given staff member having more responsibilities than a colleague in a larger school.

- One important lack of parity that we are striving to address is literacy support for struggling readers and learners. We have assigned a fixed number of specialized professional staff to each elementary school -- one literacy specialist and one reading tutor are assigned to each school. These two individuals provide direct service to students and the literacy specialist also works as an instructional coach for the teaching staff. The literacy support staff members at the larger schools assist only those students who demonstrate the highest level of need on reading assessments, while students who score better but have some need may also be served by these support staff at the smaller schools.

Since our budget has been limited, simply adding resources to the larger schools has not been a feasible option. Redistricting is not THE answer to this problem, but it helps. This is an educational benefit across the district.

- The plan will result in cost savings, somewhat difficult to quantify, but nevertheless real. For example, we will realize a savings in transportation of at least the cost of one bus (assuming a similar demand for bussing as we have this year.) Reducing one bus saves \$45,000.

In addition, the area west of Peakham, (that would move to Noyes), now requires a long route and serves the earliest starting elementary school (Loring.) We have not been able to “coordinate” the two busses that serve this area with other runs in the district (including LS).

If this area was in the Noyes district, the busses would be coordinated with an LS run (meaning the bus can transport LS students, then complete its Noyes route on time). A coordinated bus reduces the cost of that bus by 33% for SPS.

Further, the two busses mentioned above serve this area for Loring, then travel to Noyes after completing the Loring route. Due to the distance and timing, these busses arrive very late in the afternoon at Noyes. Often Noyes students have to wait for the busses for up to 25 minutes after school dismisses and arrive home well after 4:00 PM. This problem would be eliminated if the proposed plan were adopted.

- A more efficient allocation of students in relation to capacity at each school also would provide greater flexibility in locating district-wide programs for special education, preschool, and English Language Learners. In some instances, greater efficiencies or educational advantages may be found in co-locating programs. In other instances, there are advantages to spreading these programs throughout the district to avoid concentrating particular needs in one building.

We have traditionally placed district level special education programs where space is available and this often has been at the smaller enrolled schools. Educationally this is problematic because the smaller schools have fewer resources (classroom teachers, support staff and specialized service providers and school budget) to effectively assimilate the students.

If approved, the redistricting plan may provide us with an opportunity to reach a sought-after goal to realign and relocate our district-level special education programs. By offering a program (for example, for those with Language Learning Disabilities (LLD)) in one school rather than three, we will save money from greater efficiency of resource staff and improve the continuity within the program. This provides a cost efficiency and an educational benefit that otherwise would not be possible.

- We have reason to believe this plan would result in short-term and long-term cost savings. Quantifying the savings is difficult. One of the most important guiding principles is that any plan had to be at least cost-neutral. We are confident that the plan proposed meets that principle and will likely result in at least the savings of \$45,000 from reduction of one bus, but more importantly provides educational benefits that will be of value to many.

**3. *Would the proposed redistricting plan cost more money? Would the proposed redistricting plan raise the need for an override?***

The proposed redistricting plan is intended to be cost-neutral; that is, there is nothing about the plan itself that would affect the staffing, transportation, or budget needs significantly for next year. There may be some savings in transportation costs, but this is not the primary driver for the plan. At the January 12 meeting, we provided projections of class sizes -- the comparison of class allocations at each school *with or without redistricting* assumed the same staffing levels we have this year.

At this point, we do not know what our budget will be for next year or the resulting number of staff. The number of classroom teachers, and thus the class sizes, will not be determined until the final budget is set, after Town Meeting. A budget that retains our current staffing level and meets other obligations would require about a 3% increase in revenue – whether or not the redistricting plan is approved.

The Board of Selectmen is responsible for proposing an override, and has not yet decided whether an override will be offered to support next year's budget. SPS is currently in the midst of the budget process and working closely with the Finance Committee and the Board of Selectmen. Current revenue projections, which take into account an estimated 10% decrease in state funding and decreased local revenue, indicate that an override would be required to maintain the current staffing level.

The proposed redistricting plan is intended to provide greater flexibility for resource allocation over time, allowing greater efficiency and equity. Thus, if staff reductions are required, the impact will fall more equitably across the schools. The district will be better positioned to absorb the impacts of budget cuts if we adjust the enrollments among the schools.

**4. *How did the school committee determine there was a need to move forward with a redistricting plan?***

The school committee and the administration have been exploring the potential need to redistrict our elementary schools for several years. The district has examined questions of whether additional space would be needed if enrollment growth continued, whether to reconsider the grade configurations at the schools, and how our goal to implement full-day Kindergarten should tie in to our space and student allocation planning. Space utilization and planning has been one of the specified district goals since 2004.

- 2004-2005: The district appointed a Space Inventory Task Team, which conducted a survey of the uses of all five schools, in particular focusing on capacity and how the uses had changed since the planning that led to the opening of Loring school, including the 1999 establishment of school capacity numbers. The report of the Space Inventory Task Team can be found at:

<http://www.sudbury.k12.ma.us/data/Enrollment%20and%20Facilities%20Reports/2004%20Space%20and%20Facilities%20Inventory%20Report.pdf>

- 2005-2006: A subcommittee of the school committee continued research of facility use and planning, exploring the uses in each building in great detail. The school committee discussed space and growth planning, including development and enrollment updates, in particular in relation to plans for Full-Day Kindergarten and the preschool.
- 2006-2007: In the Fall of 2006, the school committee adopted a position statement on Early Childhood Education and Space Requirements. This statement confirmed the district's intention to provide a fee-based, optional full-day Kindergarten program. The school committee also stated that future planning for space and facility utilization would seek to accommodate the intent to provide full-day Kindergarten and to locate the preschool program in one location. The possibility of locating the Preschool and Kindergarten in one location, as an Early Childhood Center, was discussed in the context of broader questions about reconfiguring the grade assignments of the elementary schools. The school committee also considered whether to reconfigure the schools to provide schools housing grades K-2 and separate schools housing grades 3-5.
- 2007-2008: In the Spring of 2008, the school committee determined that more information was needed to address the grade configuration issues. The superintendent undertook research in this area, assisted by a graduate student, and produced a report for the school committee. This report can be found at:

<http://www.sudbury.k12.ma.us/data/Redistricting/Grade%20Span%20Research.Final%20Paper.pdf>

- 2008-2009: In the Fall of 2008, the school committee determined, based on educational, operational, and budget factors, that space and redistricting plans would continue to focus on the current elementary grade configuration. In November 2008, the administration and school committee considered whether a redistricting plan should be implemented for 2009-2010. The school committee decided not to implement a plan for that year, but voted to proceed with developing a redistricting plan for

November 2009, with a September 2010 implementation goal. The committee agreed upon the need for redistricting, but decided to wait a year to solidify projections to be used in the plan.

- 2009-2010: The superintendent continued work on redistricting in the summer and fall of 2009 aided by an advisory committee. On November 3, 2009, the superintendent presented an update concerning enrollment projections, capacity and staffing issues, and other factors for initial consideration by the committee. The superintendent then further explored questions and issues that had been identified and, on November 18, he presented his findings and recommended that the district proceed with redistricting for next year. The school committee then voted to accept his recommendation to move forward and directed the superintendent to develop a specific plan.

The school committee next must determine whether the proposed plan is appropriate to meet the goals of redistricting considered by the committee.

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLAN**

### ***1. Why is the district looking at school building capacity numbers that were established when the school buildings were used differently?***

One of the stated reasons for redistricting is the comparison of each school's space. That is, enrollment was compared to the stated capacity of the school. Haynes was shown to utilize a smaller percentage of capacity than the other schools, especially Loring.

In 2004-2005, a space utilization report was completed and presented to the school committee. This report examined each school, assessed how every space was utilized, determined the square footage of classrooms, support and common spaces within the school, and highlighted which spaces were not appropriate for its given use. Since then, new programs have been developed and principals have displayed their creativity in using their school's space.

Since 2004, the school committee and administration have looked carefully at how the use of the buildings has changed since 1999. For instance, the original capacity numbers did not contemplate full-day kindergarten, an English Language Learners program, or current trends in special education and the in-district placement of more students. This research included the work of the facilities subcommittee which reviewed the use of each building. Each year, the school committee has reviewed the school building capacity factors in relation to the number of available classrooms during the budget

process. The committee and the administration have come to understand that the schools could not be populated at the original capacity numbers without significant changes in building use.

We recently reviewed this report and updated the capacity calculation reflecting the current educational programming and standards in the district. After providing for pre-kindergarten, full-day kindergarten, art, music, a literacy center, Spanish, special education learning centers, special education district programs, and a computer lab, we then “loaded” the regular classrooms at 22 for grades 1 and 2, and at 24 for grades 3-5. This provided the following capacities (assuming a 100% load), percent of capacity utilized in FY10 (current year), percent of capacity in FY11 if no redistricting, and percent of capacity in FY11 if the redistricting plan is adopted:

	Current Use Capacity	FY10	FY11 (no redist)	FY11(redist)
Haynes:	484	77.1%	70.2%	84.1%
Loring:	596	98.3%	99.3%	90.4%
Nixon:	486	95.7%	88.9%	84.6%
Noyes:	698	90.9%	89.7%	90.7%

So while the capacity of each school has changed since 1999 due to a change in educational expectations and programming, the utilization difference and pressure remains the same as presented at the meeting.

It should be noted that the schools could not be populated at 100% as shown above. At 100%, the school lacks any flexibility to accommodate even minor enrollment increases and a potential downside would be that some special education students served in special programs located in the schools would need to be placed in schools outside the district – at a significantly higher cost.

**2. Given the changes in enrollment projections and their comparison to actual enrollment, how can the district move forward to redistrict with this uncertainty?**

The district historically has operated with fairly solid enrollment projections that have generally predicted our actual enrollment. Of course, there will always be uncertainties. Many of those who will enter Kindergarten five years from now are not yet even born. The economic turmoil of the last few years also has impacted the predictions about the patterns of families purchasing houses in Sudbury.

In assessing the needs and developing the plan, the district has considered the range of likely outcomes for enrollment projections. By shifting to a more efficient allocation of students relative to the building capacities, the district would be better positioned for enrollments that are higher OR lower than

currently projected. Higher enrollments could lead to increased crowding at certain schools, which would be eased by redistricting. If the enrollment trends downward, this would exacerbate the challenges of staffing a significantly smaller school in an efficient or equitable fashion as described above. Redistricting would lead to more effective management of the district's resources.

**3. Have you considered the possibility that the district would need to close Haynes in the near future in response to significant changes in enrollment or available revenue?**

The closing of Haynes within the time period targeted by the redistricting plan is highly unlikely given what we know at this time. The need to close one of our schools would arise only if there is an extraordinary and comprehensive change in the way education is provided in Sudbury and throughout the state. Currently, our schools do face dramatic fiscal constraints and the need to do things differently. Redistricting will provide the flexibility to address these challenges. We do not anticipate, however, that closing a school will be an effective remedy to the current problems we face.

Closing one of our schools would likely involve the following:

- The loss of approximately 20 classrooms and 8 specialty rooms which would lead to significantly larger classes as the Haynes students are spread throughout the district. This overcrowding would result even with declining enrollments. Class sizes may be larger than the classrooms were designed to hold.
- The Kindergarten program may be offered only as a half-day program without the additional classrooms needed for full-day classes.
- Special education students currently educated in our schools would likely be placed in schools outside the district at a significantly higher cost for tuition and transportation.
- Specialist subjects and Unified Arts would lose classroom space and thus would be scaled back or provided in modified fashion in the core classrooms.
- Computer labs and other common spaces may be converted to classrooms.
- Common spaces such as cafeterias and gymnasiums in the three remaining schools likely would not be adequate to accommodate the higher enrollment and thus these services would be curtailed.

**4. After the last redistricting plan, the relative growth at the schools did not occur as projected. Are you taking steps to avoid this result in the proposed plan?**

In recent years, the administration and school committee have discussed the lessons learned from the last redistricting effort. The construction and housing patterns that developed during the last 10 years differed from those projected for reasons that included open land protection efforts, increased tear-down construction, and unanticipated 40B developments. As these patterns emerged, some have argued that redistricting should have been implemented sooner to correct for these changes.

In projecting future growth, there are factors that are different now, primarily given the significant build-out of available lots since the last redistricting effort and the slower growth projected. The projections used at this time also may not play out as expected. The school committee must determine whether the proposed plan is reasonable and appropriate given the available information at this time.

**5. *Why was my street chosen? How were areas chosen to be moved?***

The redistricting committee spent a significant number of hours reviewing the current boundaries and assessing various scenarios for change. We started with a target number of student at each school that we believe would help accomplish our guiding principles. We then examined the “neighborhoods” or proximate areas that helped us reach the target number of students, provided bussing efficiencies, met the guiding principles and did not create foreseeable problems. Once the plan was in place, only then did we identify the names of the families who lived on the affected streets and required notification of a pending change of school.

**6. *One of the stated goals of the plan is to keep neighborhoods together. What do you mean by “neighborhood”?***

We ultimately used a more technical definition that considers a neighborhood as residences living close-by or within the proximity of each other. We also looked carefully at the network of streets within an area given that transportation costs and efficiency were drivers in our decision making model. Since we did not identify family names in our planning, we would not be aware of, or consider, if families within our “neighborhoods” interacted or had an affinity toward each other. We attempted to avoid drawing a boundary line where neighbors, either next to each other or across the street from each other, would attend separate schools.

It was mentioned that families are more connected to school communities than to neighborhoods, especially when school attendance is considered. We appreciate and understand this. In developing the plan, we assumed every

family had an affinity to their school, so we relied on proximity as the definition of neighborhood.

**7. It seems that some of the children affected by this plan will be on the bus for a much longer period of time than their current routes require. Why are areas included in the plan where this may happen?**

Length of time on the bus was a guiding principle in developing the plan. In order to meet enrollment targets and the other guiding principles, we could not be 100% successful in shortening bus trips for all students.

When deciding to relocate the area west of Peakham from Loring to Noyes, we were able to slightly shorten the distance students would travel. According to bus routing software, traveling to Noyes, instead of Loring, results in a bus trip that is of 5-7 minutes shorter than if they were traveling to Loring (some of this is due to the route being off of Route 20). For example, from Brimstone Lane to Loring is 3.63 miles, to Noyes the distance is 3.38; from Jack Pine/Prides Crossing to Loring is 5.3 miles and to Noyes is 5.00 miles.

One area where we had to extend the route slightly is the Hudson Road/Saxony area which is now in the Noyes district but would move to the Nixon district if the plan is approved. The distance to Noyes is 1.08 miles, while the distance to Nixon is 1.7 miles. We estimate a 2-3 minute longer bus trip. (Please see the next question to address why this area is included in the plan.)

**8. One of the reasons the area south of Hudson Road from Twillingate to Babe Ruth, including Hudson Road, was included in the proposed redistricting plan is because a Nixon bus and Noyes bus pick up students in the same area, and that families on opposite sides of Hudson are attending different schools. All of the students on Hudson Road attend Noyes, why the change?**

Our explanation during the meeting was probably less than clear on this issue. Currently all of Hudson Road does attend Noyes. However, the residences north of Hudson Road with streets that egress to Hudson are part of the Nixon district. Therefore, we currently have one Noyes bus that picks up students who live on Hudson Road between Twillingate and Babe Ruth, and one Nixon bus that picks up students, within the same area (at nearly the same time), from the streets that have an egress to Hudson.

This is the only situation like this in the district. Certainly we have a number of busses from two schools that traverse the same streets, but not picking up students in the same area. The redistricting plan attempts to correct for this one situation and bring greater efficiency to the transportation program overall.

## **THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN**

### ***1. If a redistricting plan is approved, what kind of transition activities will be planned to assist my child if he or she moves?***

Transition and orientation activities for students and parents are a vital component of our plan. We recognize the anxiousness that results when attending a new school. Our plan includes a very child-centered, individual plan for assuring students and families feel welcome at their new school and are included in the day-to-day activities and routines as soon as possible.

If the plan is approved, a principal coffee will be held in each school to help acclimate families and assist parents of 5<sup>th</sup> grade students in making their decision to move or elect the option to stay at their current school. The 5<sup>th</sup> grade option will be implemented if we can accommodate the preferences of parents without exceeding class size guidelines or having to add staff.

Parents will be asked to participate and assist in developing future orientation activities that best meet their needs.

In addition, each PTO will be contacting families and hosting visits to the school, inviting families to upcoming special events and offer the opportunity to be part of the school's communication network.

Principals will be contacting each parent and asking for input about their child to be used in the placement process. This will also include a request to be placed with a friend who may also be transferring or a friend already in the grade level at the new school. In addition, the principals will meet together to discuss each moving student to share learning styles, behavioral or social strength and needs in order to ensure those needs are met and strengths are supported.

Students will be provided opportunities to visit their new school prior to the end of school and orientation activities will be provided prior to the start of next year. These activities will be developed on a school-by-school basis and tailored to the school's culture and facilities.

Finally, class lists will be distributed at the end of this school year to encourage and enable summer sharing and play-dates to happen away from school.