



Listening Post Executive Summary

Date of Meeting: Oct. 17, 2016
Summary Prepared By: Jacki Marquardt
Location: Van Allen Elementary
Recorded By: Kayla McKee

1. Scope and Objective

Opportunity to ask questions and provide comments to ICCSD School Board Members specifically regarding:

- Attendance Boundaries
- Overcrowding
- Bussing - cuts to discretionary bussing, and mandatory bussing to achieve diversity and equity goals
- Facilities Master Plan
- Special Education changes following findings from the Iowa Department of Education
- General Obligation Bond Referendum
- Voluntary Transfers – transfer of secondary students to school of choice has been approved

2. Attendance at Meeting

School Board Members: Phil Hemingway, Chris Liebig and Paul Roesler

Approximately 30 members of the north corridor schools community currently assigned to North Central Junior High / Liberty High (Van Allen, Penn, Garner, Kirkwood, Lincoln)

3. Key Discussion Points

- a) It is **highly unlikely that Van Allen will be rezoned for NWJH and WHS**. There was disagreement regarding criteria that should be used when setting boundaries.
- b) Site of new North Liberty elementary is not finalized, but its location is unlikely to change secondary boundaries. This means that **families assigned to Liberty High earlier this year will still attend Liberty regardless of where Christine Grant Elementary is built**.
- c) There is likely to be an **adjustment of the schedule of projects in FMP** based on overcrowding concerns; NCJH will be over capacity, while SEJH will likely be under capacity. Waiting on new enrollment projections and results of Thoughtexchange survey before discussing changes in FMP.
- d) There is confusion and **uncertainty** with regard to what the final policy will be for **secondary voluntary transfers** following review of submitted requests (application deadline is Dec. 1). Current approved voluntary transfer policy is based on future capacity.
- e) In order to pass the **G.O. bond** next fall, the needs of all areas of the district will have to be addressed, even if most of the real need is in the north corridor. If the bond fails next fall, the board would prioritize projects and narrow the scope of the bond, and bring it before the public for vote again. The order of projects for the bond will be complete by end of January.

f) **Bussing:**

- i) Cannot provide a direct tie between cuts in discretionary bussing and increase of teachers in the classroom. Schools with bus cuts may not receive more teachers, as more teachers go to higher FRL schools (use of WRAM - weighted resource allocation model).
 - ii) Don't know precise cost for bussing for balance. However, there is also a cost associated of **not** bussing for balance at the secondary level, due to implementation of WRAM there, requiring more teachers at higher FRL secondary schools.
- g) All board members expressed **deep dissatisfaction** with the way the district has reacted since the Dept. of Education released its report on the retaliatory culture in **Special Education**. Members are concerned with the school district failing to accept full responsibility, and discouraged with lack of firm and decisive action on the part of superintendent Murley.
- h) Cost and impact of the new **Playground Lifecycle Policy** seemed to be a surprise to all board members present. Board members felt that revisions in the policy are possible, and will follow up with Craig Hansel.

4) **Action Items**

- a) It is vital to **complete Thoughtexchange survey** that families should have received repeatedly via email. The deadline to complete the survey is Thursday, October 27 at 11PM. If a family did not receive an email, they should call Thoughtexchange at 1.800.361.9027 ext. 2 or email support@thoughtexchange.com. Responses from the Thoughtexchange survey will be reviewed and prioritized, which will highlight to the board the topics that are most important to the ICCSD community.
- b) Families who wish to transfer secondary schools must submit an application by December 1st. If you have strong feelings regarding what the final voluntary transfer policy should be, let the school board know.
- c) Board members, in particular Phil Hemingway, committed to follow up with Craig Hansel regarding the new playground lifecycle policy.
- d) Board members agreed to approach the City of Iowa City about a partnership in funding Longfellow's new gym.

If you would like to contact the school board, or the board members present at the listening post, please email:

ICCSD School Board: Board@iowacityschools.org

Phil Hemingway: Phil.Hemingway@iowacityschools.org

Chris Liebig: Chris.Liebig@iowacityschools.org

Paul Roesler: Paul.Roesler@iowacityschools.org

Jacki gave introduction and a thank you to Principal Eric Ewald and board members; Phil Hemingway (right), Chris Liebig (middle) and Paul Roesler (left).

Q. Are you willing to adjust the schedule of projects in FMP based on overcrowding concerns - addition on NCJH currently scheduled for 2021, while SEJH addition scheduled for 2019, despite the fact that it will be under capacity.

Chris :

- Yes, will have to adjust due to overcrowding. There have been a lot of changes since the FMP was completed.
- Enrollment of the new elementary will also need to be considered.
- Waiting on enrollment projections - that is the only reason for the delay in changing the FMP.
- He has not seen projections for Liberty.

Paul:

- Looking at Thoughtexchange; that is the first step. Once all information is back, will talk with board about new recommendations including prioritization of projects.
- Working on defining capacities.
- Also believes the 6-plex temporary units are nice (not like the ones at Alexander).

Phil :

- Yes!
- He also sees a need to address curriculum issues and other amenities besides air conditioning.

Q. Are you in favor of future capacity projections being used to determine approval for voluntary transfers (opportunity for in-district students to transfer to another secondary school of their choice within the district)?

Chris:

- Not in favor of using future capacity; should not put kids at Liberty/NCJH if it puts the school over current capacity. Not in favor of voluntary transfers if school is over capacity.
- Alexander has capacity of 500, sitting at 400, but has added temporary classrooms, so may have to rethink other schools' capacities.
- Realize that if you transfer schools, then you don't get a bus.
- He wants to keep Wickham at West because West has room.

Paul:

- In December, the future capacity clause in voluntary transfer language will be reconsidered after application forms come in; right now we don't know how many to expect.

Phil:

- We have many different capacity numbers: pre-BLDD, BLDD (this lowered all schools capacity numbers), present capacity and what-we-actually-operate-at capacity.
- Freshmen and sophomores scheduled to go to Liberty will have to go to Liberty.
- Using future capacity for voluntary transfer could undo the FRL balancing that has just been achieved.
- Lots of bus transportation issues. Needs to be appropriately managed.
- We are not deciding how transfers will work until after transfer applications received (due 12/1/16). (Not all members agree about this)

Q. *What will the policy be for voluntary transfers since deadline is December 1st for application? Parent questioner is discouraged that the transfer policy is unknown.*

The board doesn't know what the final voluntary transfer policy will be. Current approved policy is based on future capacity.

Paul:

- Initially, he wanted no transfers at schools that are over capacity.
- Will have to look at the applications.
- It's hard with these numbers, as there are growing pains in the North Corridor.

Chris:

- Now that there are seats available, wants to give others a chance to go to a different school.
- We needed to open up open enrollment and transfers since there will be space again.

Phil:

- He wants to help Alexander and Kirkwood students get to closer schools of their choice; NOT everybody else.
- Doesn't want to create more issues than we already have.

Q. What are the chances that boundaries will change, putting Van Allen back at NWJH and West?

Paul:

- Very unlikely

Chris:

- It is unlikely that Van Allen will move to Northwest and West. It doesn't make sense to send Van Allen anywhere but NCJH and Liberty.
- However, as North Liberty grows and as two new elementary schools are added closer to Liberty, Liberty will be over capacity, and either someone has to go or we will need to make Liberty much larger.
- He would vote that Kirkwood moves out and goes back to Northwest and West.

Phil:

- Agrees with low chance of Van Allen going back to NWJH and West.
- He would rather see Kirkwood go to NWJH and West; he values geography in redistricting.
- During boundaries discussion / votes, Phil said that Kirkwood expressed that they want to go to NWJH/West, but he was outvoted. Paul interrupted and said that not all wanted to go to NW/West...
- Phil affirmed that he went to a listening post with Kirkwood families, and that unanimous of attending families that they wanted to go to NWJH / West.
- Paul commented that those who attended the listening post were not "all" families.

Chris:

- Will be interesting to see how Kirkwood will respond with voluntary transfer applications / choice as they will get to choose NWJH or NCJH.
- In addition, seventh graders cannot be turned down due to capacity issues if they choose NWJH. If Kirkwood chooses NW/West then overcrowding pressure off NCJH/Liberty.

Q. Kirkwood kids must choose their junior high school (and thus, high school) BEFORE there is any knowledge of how district activities buses will operate (or if there will be an activities bus). Questioner feels like voluntary transfer application deadline is designed to discourage transfers. Is there any chance that board will delay the date the transfer forms are due back (specifically) for Alexander / Kirkwood for this reason?

Chris:

- The district needs to know who is going where earlier rather than later in order to determine staffing and course offerings at each school.
- It is unfortunate the committee tasked with the activities bus topic will not have a report back until after December 1.

Q. *It doesn't make sense that we're not attending the closest schools. Geography makes sense in boundary decisions for many reasons (bussing costs, more exercise when walking than sitting on a bus). Is it cheaper to bus than to make smaller class sizes?*

Board is not clear.

Chris:

- Agrees with using geography when setting boundaries.
- However, all other things being equal, he sees value in FRL balance especially at the elementary school level where evidence is the strongest. But at the secondary level, the evidence is not there.

Paul:

- It is about student achievement.
- Not bussing for balance is not sustainable, due to implementation of WRAM at the secondary level, requiring more teachers at higher FRL secondary schools.

Phil:

- In favor of using geography to set school boundaries.
- He is not ready to accept that any school in ICCSD is 'failing'. There are challenges, but he believes in WRAM.
- He would rather put money into schools that are struggling due to challenges by adding resources of people and better curriculum rather than paying for buses to achieve balance.

Q. *A reason given for cutting discretionary bussing was to put more teachers in the classroom. How many teachers were added as a direct result of the bussing cuts?*

Chris:

- We are not able to give a number.
- We have more money in our general fund for sure, but can't say it went directly to fund more teachers.
- Can't say the teachers went into our building even though our bussing was cut; rather they added teachers to the highest FRL schools due to use of the weighted resource allocation model (WRAM).
- Acknowledges that we could have some legitimate gripes about unequal class sizes. The large North Liberty schools tend to have the largest class sizes, while many lower FRL small schools in the East side have cohort sizes of about 40 students per grade that "require" small class sizes. For this reason, he is pursuing paired schools with K-2 at one and 3-6 at another. There are 4 schools where this would work.

Paul (paired schools):

- He asked for someone to show him the plan for paired schools. Longfellow didn't like it, and shot the idea down the last time it came up.
- Is willing to look at it if schools would agree.

Parent follow-up - You don't need broad community agreement / support if it's in the best interest of the whole district. The board chooses to do lots of things that lack broad community support because it is in the best interest of the whole district (look at discretionary bussing issues for example).

Q. Might there be two districts at some point - a North Corridor district and Iowa City district?

Chris:

- State probably wouldn't allow it. The state of Iowa has consistently over the past years been consolidating districts, not splitting up large districts to make smaller ones.

Paul:

- Probably not enough of a tax base to support a North Corridor school district.
- We need to grow together as district rather than talk of N, S, E, W.
- He pushed for Liberty and the FMP - he has family/co-workers/friends in North Liberty. All board members need to think globally.

Q. What is the cost for a bussing for balance plan?

Chris:

- With Liberty, there is an overall reduction in bussing costs, even with bussing for balance, because fewer overall kids will need a bus.
- But I really don't have the answer to this question; earlier estimate said the cost was an additional \$250,000 for bussing for FRL balance.
- If we had even the average per pupil amount for school funding, then the district would have \$20 million more each year; then we could easily pay for discretionary bussing.
- There were also fairness issues before this year when all discretionary bussing was cut; where some areas got a discretionary bus while other areas with seemingly similar distance and safety issues did not get a bus.

Paul:

- I feel your pain - I lost discretionary bus a few years ago.

Q. There has been lots of discussion about the new elementary school in North Liberty in reference to its location. Is there a permanent location yet?

Paul:

- Final location of new NL elementary school - can't say right now due to it being in discussion.

Chris:

- Doesn't think the possible change in site for the next new elementary school in the north will change secondary boundaries/destinations.

Phil:

- The public knows where the land was purchased...

Q. We were recently told by the administration that Van Allen's TWO playgrounds must be replaced in two years. Is it possible to have a structural engineer to come in see which parts need to be redone rather than replace whole structure?

Phil:

- All parts should be replaced when they are no longer acceptable rather than following a specific 'timeline'. Supposed to be checking to see what needs to be replaced rather than replacing whole structure. Hope to look for volunteers to help cut labor costs. District is now using PPEL funds to fund playground equipment, but it is news to him that PPEL isn't enough and PTOs must fundraise significant amounts to pay for new structures. He offered to talk with Craig Hansel to see what happens as he thought PPEL would cover it. PPEL is the Physical Plant and Equipment Levy and those funds can be used for basically anything except people/staff.

Chris:

- The idea behind the life-cycle plan is to smooth things over so not having too many schools all needing playgrounds purchased at the same time.

Q. Longfellow is gaining 100 seats but it wasn't in the FMP? What is cost of that change?

Paul:

- No added cost. They moved things around, no building or structural changes are necessary.

Chris:

- Not sure that there is NO added cost. Worried about congestion and parking issues at Longfellow after renovation since they lost parking with redesign. Longfellow is not where he would have chosen to put another 100 seats.

Parent follow-up - Has the city been approached about funding part of Longfellow's gym as has been done with other schools in the past?

Paul:

- That partnership is eroding. Not sure why that partnership is going south. Later added that Iowa City has some budgetary constraints due to repairing City Park after flooding.

Phil:

- Should definitely ask about it. Youth programs at schools are going well, with no police reports made during activities.

Q. Parent asked about opportunities for future / more Industrial / Vocational classes.

Phil:

- We need to make sure we are providing a path for those not pursuing a 4 year degree. Need to address the building blocks the same way we do in Core subjects.
- Would love to have it all of our schools.
- Just looking at James Van Allen how Industrial tech classes made him a great physicist.

Q. What is Plan B if bond does not pass?

All Board Members - pretty much no plan B. Hardly have Plan A yet!

Paul:

- Would like to see an extension of the state 1 cent sales tax to 2049 (SAVE), then this bond wouldn't need to be passed since SAVE could pay for all of it.

Chris:

- Maybe would have to prioritize.
- Most of the real need for the bond is in North Liberty, but it would be dangerous to have a bond request with so much of the bond items only meeting North Liberty needs.

Phil:

- Need doesn't go away if it fails. Added fluff will go away; the request would have to become more sharpened to make bond smaller.
- Reserve of 30-40%. Phil has issues spending his grandchildren's money; doesn't want to spend the max amount we are allowed to spend in the next 5-7 years when that is sales tax money going out until 2049.
- Largest school bond to ever pass in the State was \$55 Million; this one is for about \$200 million. Must be more than A/C and capacity.

Follow-up question: Timeline for bond?

Chris:

- Will have order of projects by the end of January. Might need to think twice about items that are 5-6 years out to reduce cost. Vote will be at the same time as school board elections.

Phil:

- There is a detailed sheet on the board website BoardDocs.

Q. *How is the district changing the retaliatory culture found recently in the Special Education report? Need more than procedural changes to address that!*

Chris:

- Discouraged. Some sort of review is being done, but doesn't think change is going to happen.
- Change happens slowly.
- Student stories are very alarming.
- Can't tell if things are being addressed. The school district's response failing to accept responsibility is very concerning.

Phil:

- Discouraged as well. But leadership is the key.
- If our superintendent doesn't tolerate it then that will send a message. However, the board has not been able to motivate him [Murley] as Phil would like.

Paul:

- Doesn't feel that superintendent Murley is on board as much as he should be – Murley is not addressing it as much as he would like him to be doing.