



USD 497 News Release

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Boundary Advisory Committee Looks for Ways to Balance High School Enrollments

The Boundary Advisory Committee (BAC) met Wednesday night to review demographic maps, growth and enrollment projections, and building capacity data presented by consultant RSP & Associates to the committee and board last year when middle school boundaries were considered and, ultimately, remained unchanged. BAC members were split, virtually in half, with their interest in exploring two proposals intended to better balance high school enrollments.

Eight members chose to discuss a proposal that would expand Lawrence High's attendance area by moving its 15th Street boundary line east of Massachusetts St. north to include East and North Lawrence. The new LHS attendance area would look like an "L" lying on its back on the southern border of the district.

Another eight members opted to examine a proposal for feeder middle schools with Southwest MS and Billy Mills MS feeding into LHS, and West MS and Liberty Memorial Central MS to Free State High. Current boundaries split middle school student populations. Only one BAC member, school board member Anne Costello, showed interest in a third option to turn the high schools into 9-10 and 11-12 grade-level centers. Costello said her interest was in seeing all three proposals move forward for continued discussion.

The group that chose to discuss the LHS "L" option listed among its advantages that it may be "the path of least resistance" and it would not disrupt busing or impact high school student population racial or socio-economic disparities much. Among its drawbacks, they listed that it may not be a long-term option because due to growth patterns, it could require looking at boundary changes again, and it would not solve issues with splitting middle school populations upon transition to high school.

The members that opted to discuss the feeder middle school model said that it could improve communication and collaboration across the middle and high schools, eliminate middle school transfer requests because of the current split when transitioning to high school, balance high school enrollment numbers, and support smoother middle-to-high school transitions for families. They listed among its drawbacks that future growth could flip the current high school enrollment imbalance, some students would still have to drive by their neighborhood high school to get to their assigned high school, and it would cause a large disruption to staff in moving to different schools to follow students.

Costello shared that the grade-level centers option balances enrollment in perpetuity, supports domination in sports, enables offering the same classes at both locations, and eliminates student population racial/socio-economic disparities. She said that drawbacks of the option were that it would prevent collaboration among content peers, lead to a loss of high school traditions, cause parking imbalances, requires a district sports complex, and has no support from other committee members.

At its next meeting, the BAC will continue to review and discuss all three proposals and begin to prepare presentations to share during two public input sessions scheduled in November. Follow the BAC's work at <https://www.usd497.org/Boundaries>.