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Dear Lexington School Community:

On Tuesday, December 3, 2019, the Lexington School Committee will vote on a final redistricting plan. This communication is intended to provide helpful background information and an overview of the decision-making process prior to the redistricting vote. At the School Committee meeting next Tuesday, the Administration will give a brief overview of each redistricting plan, followed by a discussion among School Committee members about the specific plan. We will begin with Plan A, and each School Committee member will have an opportunity to share the pros and cons of Plan A from their perspective. The same process will be used to discuss Plans B and C. Once School Committee members have reviewed the three plans, they will deliberate and make a final decision about which redistricting plan they will adopt and implement in the 2020 - 2021 school year.

As a reminder, three types of plans are now under consideration: Plan A (Original Plan); Plan B (Minimal Impact Plan) and Plan C (Alternative Minimal Impact Plan). Early in the process, I provided a recommendation to the School Committee, asking them to adopt Plan A (Original Plan). We then held public hearings and meetings with residents of components. In so doing, we gained insight and surfaced challenges from community members who would be directly affected by Redistricting Plan A. Residents raised concerns about walkability, traffic congestion, and the unnecessary division of neighborhoods, among others. They also offered data and plans of their own, mirroring the scenarios developed by Applied Geographics and the Administration early on in Phase II redistricting. As a result, Plan B emerged, followed by Plan C—a final attempt to address additional problems we learned about through the public hearing and community input process.

Based on current enrollment figures, the three plans (Plans A, B, and C) effectively use our existing and newly available school capacity to ensure equitable and appropriate learning environments, which is the problem we are attempting to resolve. For this reason, I am retracting the Plan A recommendation I made to the School Committee on October 1, 2019. On December 3, 2019, after the School Committee has an opportunity to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the three scenarios, if needed, I will weigh in and offer guidance on a preferred plan.

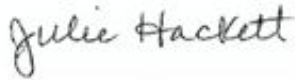
We know that redistricting can be challenging for all children and families impacted. For administrators, superintendents, and especially for School Committee members faced with the pressure of a final decision and vote, redistricting may be one of the least desirable tasks we face. On the surface, the act of redistricting may even seem fundamentally at odds with our child-centered educational mission, and we are acutely aware of its implications for children and families.

Lexington children are not “dots on a map” or statistics to any of us. They are unique individuals with very distinct needs. At any given moment in time, these needs change—some children require more support, some require more independence, some are fragile, and some are resilient. Those tasked with making the redistricting decision, take seriously our responsibility to nurture, advocate, and find

equitable solutions to problems, so our students can continue to learn, grow, and develop into joyful, curious, compassionate young people. We feel so grateful and privileged to spend time with your children each day. Whatever the outcome of the redistricting vote, please know that we will work closely with the community to ensure a smooth transition for all our students.

In closing, I wish to extend my deepest appreciation to all who participated in Phase II Redistricting. Special thanks go to members of the School Committee; Dr. Maureen Kavanaugh, Project Manager; Priya Sankalia and Kate Hickey of Applied Geographics; Richard Labrie, Transportation Consultant; the Lexington Redistricting Advisory and Working Groups; the President's PTO/PTAs Presidents Council; and Lexington residents. Most of all, I want to thank our students, staff, and families, whose patience, passion, and participation in Phase II redistricting makes me proud to be part of the Lexington school community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julie Hackett".

Julie L. Hackett, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

LEXINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS REDISTRICTING BRIEF - NOVEMBER 27, 2019

PROBLEM

The problem we are attempting to resolve is to effectively use our *existing* and *newly available school capacity* to ensure *equitable and appropriate learning environments for students* across the district. I chose the word “resolve” intentionally, as we are aware the result of Phase II redistricting is unlikely to be satisfactory to all. This document takes into account several variables and tensions and offers three workable solutions or plans to adequately address the overarching problem of effective utilization of existing and newly available school capacity.

BACKGROUND

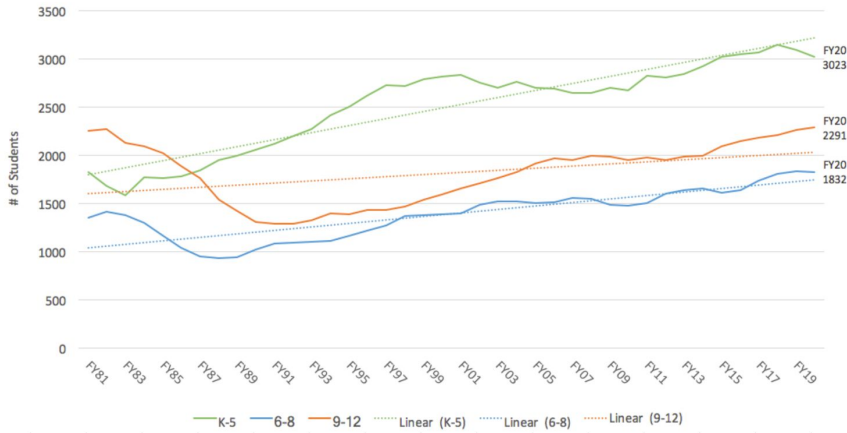
Due to increasing enrollments, Lexington has experienced overcrowding in many of its school buildings. High-density neighborhoods in certain areas, coupled with rising enrollments, create less than desirable overcrowding in individual schools. In response, we have attempted both short-term and long-term solutions to address these challenges, including an examination of our school assignment policies, previous attempts to redistrict, additions and renovations to existing schools, and the construction of new school buildings. Lexington Children’s Place recently opened its doors, and the new Hastings Elementary School is nearing completion. School assignment boundaries at both the elementary and middle school levels now must be adjusted.

Redistricting is not new to Lexington. We have learned from those with firsthand knowledge that the first round of redistricting happened right around 1975. Shortly after, four new schools were closed, necessitating another flurry of redistricting. Redistricting also occurred in the 1980s, the 1990s, and the early 2000s (2006 and 2009). In 2016, an attempt was made to redistrict; however, no redistricting occurred—instead, a “flexible boundaries” strategy was adopted. We have gone more than a decade without making any substantive redistricting adjustments. At the same time, enrollment in the Lexington Public Schools continues to steadily increase, with our elementary schools experiencing only very recent stability in enrollments—likely an anomaly similar to the slight drop in enrollment we experienced in 2009. In other words, there are no guarantees that enrollment is trending in a more favorable direction. It is now time for us to take advantage of the additional space garnered by the addition of two new school buildings (Lexington Children’s Place and Hastings Elementary School) and to address the significant inequalities in schools caused by enrollments far exceeding planned operating capacities in our elementary and middle schools.

Enrollment Trends and School Building Capacity

To better understand Lexington’s current enrollment challenges, it is helpful to look at how enrollment has changed over time and by grade span. During the past 30+ years, Lexington has experienced a period of sustained and rapid enrollment growth. Growth in the elementary grades from 2008 - 2018 was roughly the equivalent of adding an entire elementary school of 500 students in a 10-year period. The uneven distribution of growth across schools and grade levels has led to overcrowding at Bowman, Bridge, and Fiske Elementary Schools and Clarke Middle School. In the immediate future, fiscal and physical constraints prevent further major expansions to elementary and middle schools in the southeastern area—the location of the majority of overcrowded buildings.

Background: How has enrollment changed over time and by level?



The elementary (K-5) enrollment pressure appears to be abating, at least temporarily. Still, elementary enrollment is higher than enrollment in any other year in the past two decades. At the middle level, we have experienced a steady increase in enrollments over time, with the current year of enrollment being the highest of any in the past three decades. High school (9-12) enrollment at one time was higher than the enrollment we currently experience; however, with a projected increase of approximately 400 students in the next five years, the high school is experiencing the most significant growth of any other grade span.

School capacity continues to be a challenge for most buildings. Ideally, we would like to see percentages in every school building at approximately 90 - 95%, ensuring some room for growth and expansion if necessary. Currently, we see planned operating capacity percentages in the unacceptable range of 68 - 118% at the elementary schools and 91 - 103% at the middle schools.¹ Over time, an increase in system-wide programmatic demands and district-wide enrollment pressures—particularly in high-density neighborhoods—translates to outsized capacity issues at Bowman, Bridge, and Fiske Elementary Schools and Clarke Middle School.

We are fortunate to have new capacity available at Hastings Elementary School for the 2020 - 2021 school year, which will help address some of the current space deficits. Our middle school expansions are now complete, offering some additional relief; however, we must now adjust assignment areas to allow us to relocate enough students to space available in schools on the west side of town. To provide relief, some students need to be assigned away from overcrowded schools. The difficult task before us now is to decide which students from which areas should be moved.

Phase I Redistricting (2015)

Phase I redistricting began in 2015, prompted by severe overcrowding at some schools and with the completion of modular additions at Bridge, Bowman and Fiske Elementary Schools. With substantial elementary and middle school building projects still in progress, only minor modifications were made to the elementary school assignment map. Given the limited amount of additional space available at the time, we assigned only new and incoming students to schools that aligned with the new maps. To further control the distribution of new students, we implemented a “flexible boundaries” approach, allowing us to consider school building capacity and enrollment when assigning new, incoming students to schools. The “flexible boundaries” approach provides the Administration with a tool to temporarily

¹ For more information on school capacity percentages, see the PowerPoint that can be accessed on the Superintendent’s Blog at <https://lexsuper.home.blog/2019/02/08/redistricting-updates/>.

relieve pressure at particular schools—at the same time, it creates significant transportation challenges and inefficiencies for the district.

As enrollment continues to increase, school buildings throughout the district are now either at- or over-capacity. Phase II requires a more comprehensive redistricting effort that would need to be implemented soon after the completion of the new Lexington Children’s Place and Hastings Elementary School in 2019 - 2020. On January 22, 2019, we officially launched the start of Phase II elementary and middle school redistricting efforts.

Phase II Redistricting (2019)

We engaged the expertise of Applied Geographics to consult with us on Phase II redistricting challenges and to help us build a viable plan to meet the long-term needs of the Lexington Public Schools. Applied Geographics and the Administration identified some 20+ scenarios to address our enrollment and capacity-related challenges. Several variables were examined in the development of these scenarios, including (but not limited to): school locations and capacity; town land use; housing data (including type, location, significant developments, etc.); plans for future residential development; residential sales information; student enrollment (including distribution, locations, demographics, historical trends, and overall projections); transportation information (including bus registrations, ride length, distance, number of stops, walkability, biking and bus routes, and noted safety concerns); geophysical Town features; School Committee policies; grade-to-grade transitions; and parent and community feedback.

Parent and community feedback came in many forms. Residents with children no longer in the school system weighed in to support their neighbors. Parents and community members completed surveys and submitted emails, letters, and petitions. They made their voices heard at public hearings, and they organized individual and group meetings with School Committee members and the Administration. Community members offered their individual and collective analysis of the scenarios, and neighborhoods collaborated to develop plans of their own, all of which were analyzed by Applied Geographics and the Administration.

As with any redistricting effort, no plan is perfect. In the end, arriving at the final decision is a subjective process that relies upon choices and trade-offs. While others have their ideas about priorities, the framework we used to evaluate scenarios was heavily weighted on enrollment and school capacity. We also took into consideration family and community impacts, transportation and finances, and the sustainability of the plan. After considering all of the options and variables, the Phase II redistricting process concludes with three plans that we believe are worthy of further consideration.

OVERVIEW OF THREE REDISTRICTING SCENARIOS

Applied Geographics and the Administration analyzed more than 20 scenarios and considered a wide variety of community inputs to find the most effective solution to resolve the overcrowding problem. After close examination and careful review, we identified three scenarios that hold the most promise. Any of the plans that follow reasonably assist us in the effective use of our existing and newly available school capacity, ensuring equitable and appropriate learning environments for students across the district. We acknowledge that no plan is perfect and the three plans that follow have their limitations. A summary of each of the three plans follows, and for ease of reference, they have been renamed “Plan A” (Original Plan), “Plan B” (Minimal Impact Plan), and “Plan C” (Alternative Minimal Impact Plan).

From the beginning of this process, we have emphasized that we can make any plan work; it is just a matter of choice. Redistricting is a highly subjective process, and what may be a top priority for one

individual, may be the last choice for another. Each of the three plans achieves what we set out to accomplish in Phase II redistricting: to make effective use of our existing and newly available school capacity. Each plan comes with significant trade-offs and consequences that add to the complexity of the issues we are attempting to resolve. Since priorities vary from person to person and group to group, we have encountered many tensions throughout Phase II redistricting,

Plan A: Original Plan

At the first public hearing on October 1, 2019, we submitted “Plan A” or the “Original Plan” that would potentially impact 710 students. Initially, we did not include grandfathering options. Plan A requires more widespread change throughout Lexington and attempts to adjust dense areas located in the southern portion of Town, setting off an unavoidable “domino effect” throughout the community. For example, if we assign areas South of Route 2 back to Bridge and Bowman Elementary Schools, areas on the west side of town then can be reassigned to Hastings Elementary School where space is available. To relieve pressure at Bowman Elementary School, the areas that are the most logical to move are adjacent to Harrington Elementary School; this, in turn, prompts the need to move components from Harrington to Fiske Elementary School, and so on.

When we initially presented Plan A, we made a conscious choice to exclude grandfathering options. They adversely impact transportation and efficiencies, and we understood the need for a comprehensive redistricting plan. Furthermore, we were concerned that the introduction of grandfathering as a possible solution would generate more grandfathering requests, all of which we cannot accommodate. After carefully weighing School Committee and community concerns, we modified Plan A to include grandfathering for rising fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth-graders. As anticipated, we continue to receive additional grandfathering requests. While our educator hearts would like to make an exception for every family, it would be counterproductive to this Phase II redistricting effort to extend any additional grandfathering beyond the option of allowing rising fifth through eighth graders to remain in their currently assigned schools (if they so choose). We acknowledge that the current grandfathering options are important to children and families, and when looked at individually, the arguments being made seem logical. Yet, we cannot ignore the potential impact of increasing grandfathering options that, when taken together, may ultimately fail to provide relief to overcrowded schools.

Plan B - Minimal Impact Plan

At the second public hearing on October 24, 2019, we presented “Plan B” or the “Minimal Impact Plan,” affecting approximately 352 students. Informed by further analysis and community input, the final version of this plan includes one refinement to achieve better balance among schools. The plan now includes Bridge 3 assignment to Bowman. The prior version of this plan kept assignment to Bridge. Plan B involves the movement of components from Fiske to Harrington and Hastings Elementary Schools. No changes are made to dense southern components and therefore does not set off domino effect

Plan B reduces the number of students assigned to new schools by half, which is the primary difference between the two plans. Similar to Plan A, reasonably balanced school capacities can be achieved with this approach. Plan B also maintains the possibility of walking to school for some families in areas around Fiske and Harrington Elementary Schools. As with Plan A (Original Plan), students residing outside of assignment areas due to Phase I grandfathering or flexible assignment would also be moved to newly assigned schools. Plan B also considers the possibility of allowing current Hastings Elementary School students living in areas assigned to other schools (i.e., Estabrook 3 and 4 located along Reed Street) to stay in their current school.

Plan C - Alternative Minimal Impact Plan

The “Alternative Minimal Impact Plan” or “Plan C” attempts to respond to the identified deficits of Plans A and B. Plan C was first introduced in its entirety on November 18, 2019, although elements of the plan have been shared at various times and in multiple forms. Plan C encompasses all of the components of Plan B, plus some additional revisions to address the challenges associated with the two other plans.

Plan C shares many of the same features of Plan B (Minimal Impact Plan). Plan C involves the movement of components from Fiske to Harrington and Hastings Elementary Schools. Plan C makes no changes to southern components, so it does not set off the domino effect we observe with Plan A. Plan C further reduces the number of students assigned to new schools (estimated impact at 226 students), and achieves planned operating capacity. Similar to Plan B, Plan C also maintains the possibility of walking to school for some families in areas around Fiske and Harrington Elementary Schools. Further, it achieves the alignment of the elementary with the middle school boundaries, which has been an ongoing challenge for the district. The final version of Plan C includes one refinement since its original presentation on November 18, 2019. To achieve better balance among schools, Estabrook 2 or Katahdin would be assigned to Hastings Elementary School, which also is featured in Plan B. The previous version of Plan C keeps the assignment to Estabrook Elementary School.

A summary of the additional components (beyond Plan B) that would be impacted by Plan C follows.

- To create better balance between Hastings and Estabrook Elementary Schools, Estabrook 3, and Estabrook 4 (Reed Street) would stay in Estabrook Elementary School. This area is currently split between Hastings and Estabrook. **Note: these potential changes were included in Plan B.*
- Bowman 3 (Monroe Hill) would be assigned to Hastings Elementary School. Students in this component currently attend Bowman Elementary School. Under Plan C, approximately 15 students would attend Hastings Elementary School. **Note: this component was a potential change identified in Plan A.*
- Hastings 6 (April Lane) would be assigned to Bowman. This area is currently split between Hastings (17 students would move to Bowman) and Bowman (11 students would remain at Bowman). **Note: this component was a potential change identified in Plan A.*
- Under Plan C, Bridge 3 would stay at Bridge Elementary School, and Bridge 4 would be assigned to Hastings Elementary School. **Note: this component was a potential change identified in Plans A and B, but specific school assignments varied.*

Similar to Plans A and B, students residing outside of assignment areas due to Phase I grandfathering or flexible assignment also would be moved to newly assigned schools. Plan C also considers the possibility of allowing current Hastings Elementary School students living in areas assigned to other schools (i.e., Estabrook 3 and 4 located along Reed Street) to stay in their current school.

Through flexible assignment of new students, Plan C would allow students in density populated areas South of Route 2 to attend the closest school whenever possible. Over time we would likely assign students in Main Campus/Hills to Bridge or Bowman Elementary Schools. These students would then attend Clarke Middle School. One approach to explore could be clustering school assignments based on apartment buildings in complexes, rather than by random assignment. Students from Lexington Ridge would be assigned to Bridge and Hastings Elementary Schools, with Bridge Elementary School

students attending Clarke Middle School and Hastings Elementary School students attending Diamond Middle School.