

Minutes of the Elmbrook Enrollment
Balancing Task Force Meeting

Present: Bill Aslin, Andrew Farley, David Frank, Mark Hansen (left earlier), Kori Hartman, Erik Kass, Jean Lambert, Bridget Mangan, Lisa Mellone, Paul Neumeier, Franklin Onwubuariri, Heather Paradis, Silvia Paquini, Lisa Rettler, Sarah Sagert, Thomas Schaefer, John Schnabl, Jeanne Siegenthaler (left earlier), Stephen Taipala (arrived later), Danny Thomas, Daniel Westfahl, and Scott Wheeler

Absent: Karen Wolff, Jeff Wurster, and Liz Zmuzinski

Also: Deborah Nustad and Mike Thompson

The meeting began at 6:05 p.m. in the Board Room of the Central Administrative Offices. Superintendent Mark Hansen welcomed everyone and thanked them for their commitment to solving a “good,” redistribution problem. He likes the task force’s representation from all schools and looks forward to the brainstorming of best ideas. The elementary enrollment over the past four years has not changed significantly, but there has been a shift of 160 students to the southwest quadrant of the District.

Assistant Superintendent Erik Kass provided a brief history of the District, the expected project process, and this meeting’s objectives. He showed how often schools have been opened and closed and the District’s enrollment over time. Recent issues have focused on elementary enrollment growth and facility capacity. Applied Population Laboratory was hired to do projections of enrollment, and their report highlighted move-ins, market share increase, housing starts, and birth rates. Eppstein Uhen Architects also has worked to define capacity ranges for District schools.

The purpose of the Task Force is to address current enrollment balancing challenges by making a recommendation to the Board of Education on balancing enrollment for the next five years (or more). Mike Thompson was introduced as the Task Force Facilitator. Mr. Thompson thanked the members and provided his background information. He started with a WIFLE exercise (what I feel like expressing) that allowed each member to offer an introduction, background, experience and expectations. Since obstacles and disagreements may occur, members were urged to take ownership, be accountable and responsible, and avoid blaming, excuses and denial by showing up and participating, doing the work required, functioning as a team, and avoiding the “I Know” personality. Encouragements were given to speak from experience when possible, speak to one another as peers, resist the urge to interrupt, welcome input from all, and avoid monopolizing the discussion. Dissatisfaction with the present situation times the vision of what could be plus the first steps toward a solution will overcome any resistance or fear of too much work or cost (Mark Hansen leaves).

Framing the Way

Members split into four groups of five each to discuss their thoughts on why the Task Force was formed (summary is attached).

Critical Success Factors

The Task Force critical success factors were shown with a request for the group to add any that they felt were needed (summary is attached). Questions asked during this part of the meeting included if Elm Grove is expected to attend Tonawanda (no), if the factors were listed in order (no), if the Task Force should rank them (perhaps at a later meeting), how the Board feels about them (pulled from the Board charge to the Task Force), if some of the factors are subsets of other factors, if the capacities at the high schools were the same (numbers ready at next meeting), and whether the Board of Education has a description of what excellent elementary schools are like. The objective is to bring back a more complete list of critical success factors at the next Task Force meeting.

Shaping a Vision

Deborah Nustad conducted the meeting section on vision, looking toward pushing mental boundaries and using focus and dreams to achieve solutions that are challenging, evolving, behavioral and actionable, and easy to understand. Members were asked to list what social scientists in 2046 would say about this group's work and what a reporter in 2018 would have heard from the Elmbrook community (summaries attached) (Jeanne Siegenthaler leaves).

Critical Questions

Mike Thompson asked for a list of critical questions that members had about data or information that they felt were needed (summary attached). He also questioned whether the members felt that an attendance policy would be appropriate.

Meeting Schedule

Erik Kass stated that, with a December 1 deadline for a decision, a recommendation from the Task Force should be prepared by the middle of August. Task Force meetings and/or forums were suggested for April 5 and 26, May 10 and 25 or 26, June 2 and 22, and July 27. An earlier meeting in July may also be needed. Questions included whether one day (June 2) for a community open forum would be sufficient, if a Board survey should be conducted as well as a stakeholder survey, whether end points are needed, if it should be public knowledge that nothing will change until 2017, whether conflicts with school activities have been checked (no), if the starting time could be 7:00 to allow coaches to finish their sporting duties, and whether data would be sent to members ahead of meetings. A request was made to ensure that the community members with no children in the District be invited to any open forum.

Other

Erik Kass advised that Google Drive documents may be used to communicate with the Task Force. E-mails will come only from Erik Kass, Mike Thompson or, occasionally, Mark Hansen.

The meeting ended at 9:10 p.m.

FRAMING THE WAY SUMMARY

Crowding is currently a problem in some of our schools, with capacity in other buildings
Capacity in other District buildings and schools points to a student-distribution problem
Redistribution is thoughtful and needs to capture the human factor
Create a solution with the least amount of stress on families, students, and staff
Need to do this to maintain the District's quality in our schools
Need to nip this issue in the bud, before it gets out of hand
Staff is looking to us to represent their best interests and maintain a great place to work
Staff is looking to us to represent students' best interests and maintain a great place to learn
Staff trust is high right now, and we need to maintain it

Community engagement

Community education

Define short- and long-term scope of the challenge/problem

Widen our lens for solutions

Find a win-win-win

Find an enduring strategy

Find diligent, intentional decision-making solutions and use for communications

Decisions made -- don't make same mistakes or follow similar paths

Avoid contentious discussions with "winning" and "losing" sides creating divisiveness

Create community unity when making a decision

Arrive at solutions in a productive way

Represent students, families, and staff

Improve environmental factors (ergonomics) with better use of facilities (empty vs. crowded)

Maintain positive sense of community

Look for long-term solutions

Fiscal stability versus emotional aspects

Emotional aspects versus fiscal stability

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS SUMMARY

Develop new K-5 tract boundaries that balance enrollments across all five elementary schools

Enrollment recommendations do not exceed 85% of the schools; current capacity for five years

Honor the current feeder path of families and students currently enrolled in the District from elementary to middle to high school as much as possible

Impact the smallest number of families

Provide for grandfathering of families, if possible and appropriate, to reduce the short-term impact on families

Take into consideration the potential for expansion to the current preschool program

Honor "time on the bus" transportation policy

Tracks studied for elementary only; feeder system for middle and high school

Maintain K-5, 6-8, 9-12

Maintain appropriate student/teacher ratios and class sizes

Not imposing solution on parents; offer choice where possible/feasible

Strive for parity between schools, both elementary and secondary

Each school has same offerings

Provide for balance or parity for school demographics

Solutions should be clear for families and staff

Hire more teachers if needed

SHAPING A VISION SUMMARY

Adults got out of the way of kids' creativity

Safety, stability, support

Closed the achievement gap

Entrepreneurship

Excellence blossoms

Acknowledgement of the problem

Followed their passion since Kindergarten

Made hard decisions

Challenged and taught to problem solve

Learned to collaborate

Innovative ideas

Great group of people who looked past individual interest for the good of the District

Commitment to excellence

A new definition of excellence

All kids stretched and supported to be their best selves

Gave them the power to adapt to change by showing that the community can profitably come together

Dreams are encouraged

Education shines, in every sense of the word: innovative leaders, great educators, motivated students, supportive families, and the money to do it well

Fostered community support for public education

Student-centered decision-making

WHAT REPORTER HEARD SUMMARY

Headlines

#5Ps: Passionate pathways provide a positive product

We got this: balance excellence in the Elmbrook School District

We listened

Elmbrook Rebalancing: an unqualified success

Most Important Changes

Enrollment balancing occurred without dividing the community

Resources allocated to maximize student learning

Each student had an IEP, and teacher training followed

Everyone had an equal voice, and each was valued

New Comments Following Change

Nothing has changed -- it is the same (change had no ripple effect)

They listened to our concerns, and students can now stretch, learn, and grow

We have pride in the District, not just our school

The School Board listened

Important/Difficult Decisions Made

Redistricted someone again

We got this right so we will not need to do this again in five more years

Made agile decisions

Addressed the big picture for a long-term solution

Chose which families who would be impacted

Minimized disruptions during rebalancing versus fiscal implications

Tax increase

Imposed a decision on groups who did not want it

Who Supported/How Obtained

Task Force members and media personnel who got the word out

Staff set the tone for parents and students to follow

Those involved in the process of engagement

Administrative team who showed the group that they respect them and entrusted them with data

Task Force interactions and each school community

How Success Measured

Personal growth

Student test scores

Better community satisfaction (staff and family surveys)

Fewer staff and family departures from the District

Everyone was equally happy or angry

Communication volume was appropriate

In the end, is enrollment balanced?

Why Better Than Other Times

Broader representation than Hillside

Fix was in – no sincere engagement

Created a level playing field for all schools and integrated students well

This time we listened

CRITICAL MEMBER QUESTIONS

Is this going to be a redrawing or shifting of where existing tracts go?

What is the plan for preschool growth/decentralized plan?

Need enrollment trend numbers by school

Need to know importance of current feeder system

What type of communication will come from the group? What is the protocol?

Middle and high school capacities

How much growth do the enrollment projections show by tract?

Preschool projections (plans and locations)

Tract enrollment trends

How much will one tract's variance affect results?

What does it look like after 2020?

Data needs

Student growth projections

Where are the children (school by color)?

Where are the new housing developments and are they projected to have children?

How will Board votes affect this issue?

How will it be perceived?