



Critical Factors in Successful Attendance Zone Planning

Population and Survey Analysts
303 Anderson Street
College Station, TX 77845
979-693-8962

www.pasademographics.com



Summer, 2011



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Planning attendance zones with a boundary committee is a costly and time-intensive endeavor, but one that affects numerous students and families throughout any school district. Typically, a district can expect to spend between \$20,000 and \$200,000 in staff time, based on the number of zones to be re-aligned. Also, based on the need for varied options, consultants who undertake this task, and who also facilitate the planning process can cost from \$7,000 to \$40,000. And, this amount is apart from the projections of added students for subdivisions and apartments over time, which is a necessary component for creating stable attendance zones.

The rationale for such extensive work on new zones, and rigorous data to support the creation of these zones, is that the public may find flaws in the process and/or the attendance zone plan itself if a great deal of time is not expended on this very critical task.

APPROACH I: Many Districts choose to complete this rezoning task by utilizing a boundary committee. Because a boundary committee requires so much in the way of resources and time, the committee must be handled well. The committee needs a clear directive, needs to be led by a strong, informed administrator, needs to have a wealth of accurate data at its disposal, and needs to be led in a manner that does not allow some committee members to self-serve or to waste the committee's time.

APPROACH II: Some districts choose to make most of the decisions in-house, with a district administrative team, and then provide opportunity for comment by the public. This normally only works well with a very seasoned, unbiased administrative team, led by a very strong administrator.

APPROACH III: Recently, a few districts have utilized a hybrid approach, whereby a committee is utilized for input and to help narrow the decisions to one or two options, but where the ultimate decision making still lies with the administration. Likewise, this approach requires strong committee leadership, and at the committee level, can lead to helpful input in committee meetings, but once the final decision has been made, there can be division and strong disagreement from the community.

The remaining sections of this report focus on specific rezoning considerations when dealing with (a) high schools versus elementary schools, and (b) the special challenges of dealing with diverse student populations.



BASICS OF ESTABLISHING A BOUNDARY COMMITTEE

1

SCHOOL BOARD INVOLVEMENT

School Board involvement in attendance zone planning varies throughout the state, but if the Board is involved at all, the involvement typically consists of one or more of the following tasks: establishing a boundary planning philosophy, creating a Board policy surrounding boundary planning processes, or assisting in committee member selection.

If the Board desires such direct involvement, a great deal of time should be expended by the Board on any of the tasks described below, since Board members wishing to be heavily involved must be as knowledgeable as are the committee members. The Board members should have the same level of understanding of all demographic and other data, as well as the rationales behind various boundary options as does the boundary committee. Knowledge of the data forming the basis for zone options provides the foundation on which a successful boundary process will be completed. Since this Board involvement rarely occurs, it is normally best to leave the boundary planning to a boundary committee.

Many districts find that it is best for the Board to give the administration a *mandate* to establish the boundary planning process. Then, the administration can focus on the research and approaches that comparable districts have taken, and the lead administrator can work with the committee to set the parameters for attendance zone planning. If the committee members aid in the establishment of the criteria for attendance zone planning, the criteria become District-specific, and the committee understands and recalls the criteria more often during their decision-making process. The committee members seem better able to assess each possible option based on their planning criteria if the committee is the body that helped develop those criteria.

It is typically better for a seasoned administrator(s) to be responsible for selection of committee members, as they are better able to work with school principals to find dedicated parents willing to commit the time and willing to be ambassadors of the plan. Also, the administrator(s) will be able to select committee members who represent key neighborhoods most likely to be affected by attendance zone changes.

SELECTING A "LEAD" ADMINISTRATOR AND A BOUNDARY COMMITTEE FOR ZONE PLANNING

It is often best for a knowledgeable administrator to ask for committee volunteers through the individual schools in the potentially affected areas. At the same time, principals in the potentially affected current zones will provide the names of parents, especially from any neighborhoods which are fairly certain to be moved to another attendance zone. There should be committee members from every major subdivision potentially affected, although some districts use one or two persons from every "Planning Unit" and do not concentrate on individual subdivisions.

If an area or subdivision not initially represented on the committee is brought into a serious option, the lead administrator should call the principal for the area school and get him/her to recommend an additional committee member immediately. This committee member should be brought up to speed on the data, the options to date, etc., as soon as possible, so as to not bog down the process. If this addition of a new committee member occurs late in the process, after the committee has done a great deal of learning and understanding of the data, it might be necessary for this new member to meet with the lead administrator in a separate meeting so as to educate the new member rapidly so that he or she can immediately speak knowledgeably regarding the concerns raised.

Normally, there should not be more members of the committee than absolutely necessary to represent the affected areas, as an unnecessarily large committee is difficult to manage. It is helpful to have relevant principals sit in and be a part of the committee itself, and any Board members and other administrators who attend should also be associated with a "team" [refer to later section]. None of the principals or Board members or administrators should vote on options for zones, as the district officials should continue to be perceived as neutral to all options that meet the planning criteria. The goal of the principal should be to provide relevant data specific to their school, without bias. If the principal, for example, is seen to prefer one option over another, the principal is then seen as preferring one *student population* over another.

Top administrators should be present for all attendance zone meetings. Their presence signals the importance of the meetings, allows the meetings to proceed more amiably (so that there cannot be anarchy or rebellion among the committee members -- which may occur when only one or a few administrators are present), and the presence of top administrators encourages the meetings to be brief and useful. The presence of several administrators also allows for general questions to be more readily answered. While sometimes unpleasant, it is essential for these top administrators to attend boundary planning meetings.

A District should not use a facilitator or any person who approaches the meetings as a facilitator. Rather, an administrator who is widely respected should be used, who has knowledge of all subdivisions and all major streets in the potentially affected areas, and who is able to use the data for each Planning Unit and can understand the complexities of multiple

options. On occasion, well respected and highly knowledgeable community members can be well suited to lead the committee, although this is best in a fairly non-contentious attendance zone planning process.

A facilitator is trained to reach consensus by getting rid of options not useful or not highly ranked, whereas the process we recommend often needs to be one of small, iterative changes made in existing options to reach the best possible conclusion. Portions of several options may need to be retained and combined, and this is not normally the process that professional facilitators are trained to use. Often this is a matter of complex arithmetic – and recalculation of the impacts of any small change in an existing option. Thus, knowledge of each option is more important than professionally facilitating a meeting. Use of a facilitator often means that consensus is never reached. Rather, the seasoned and respected administrator may have to help the committee find a single best solution. Then, ultimately, two boundary committee members take this best option to the Board, rather than the lead administrator. Finally, the lead administrator may have to strongly guide the committee, giving them common-sense directions to reach their ultimate goals, especially in contentious situations...unlike the role of a facilitator.

Often, facilitators tend to have a weak geographic knowledge of a district (subdivisions and streets), and, more important, often do not have data analysis skills as a strength. On occasion, a professional facilitator will not be able to complete the entire boundary planning process, and will have to be removed by the District administration due to the inability of the committee to work well to complete their assignment using a conventional facilitator's normal means.

A District can expect that the lead administrator will need to commit about 1/10th of his or her time per year to this project and up to 50% of their time during the process itself. For a district that has to add (or perhaps close) schools annually, this is a big role in the district for one administrator.

If necessary, it is possible that an "outside" administrator (known to have experience with boundary planning from another district) could assist the in-house administrator, so that there is a leadership duo for the boundary committee meetings. This would be especially important for a district that is new to the rezoning process.

WAYS TO ORGANIZE THE COMMITTEE'S OVERALL TASKS

Plan to provide data and color maps that a committee can easily see and read. Make sure that the color maps include all current subdivisions and apartments in the affected areas, and all planned new development. Ideally, provide them with black and white maps of data to use as templates so that the members can draw in their own boundaries on these maps. Most districts provide a boundary committee with the entire demographic report, so that the

committee members are well-educated about the demographic composition and trends in all sectors of the district.

The committee members have committed their time to this project. Their time should be respected by: giving them good data/color maps with which to work, by having an able administrator to lead the group, and by having supportive and helpful top administrators to assist during every meeting. If handled properly, the boundary committee members will act as ambassadors to explain the complexities of the options and the final plan to others (i.e., their friends and neighbors). If the District does NOT handle the process well, the District loses credibility and, rightly, does not have the respect of the committee members or of the community. In sum, bad uses of a committee's time and bad approaches to handling boundary committee meetings quickly become public knowledge.

Encourage the boundary committee to share options with their friends and neighbors, and to communicate the difficulties of working with the diverse needs of the entire district and the challenges of working with the affected areas. This communication is an important aspect of the boundary committee's efforts. (Occasionally, in non-homogeneous districts, it may be determined that no outside discussion should occur until final options have been created so as to quell rumors and to avoid unnecessary contention about options that are ultimately discarded during the committee process. Normally, though, boundary members are encouraged to speak with neighbors and friends during the process.)

When the committee is charged with generating new options, never allow individual boundary committee members to provide options. Options for potential zones should emanate only from within individual teams within the boundary committee. A *team* approach should always be used. During the first meeting, the lead administrator should "count off" so that 4 to 8 teams are formed. Thus, members sitting beside each other will be separated during the "counting off" process, and cliques are destroyed at the first meeting. An optimum team size would be 4 to 8 individuals, because often not all team members will be present for any one meeting. An option must arise from within a team and be presented to the whole committee by its proposer, but only if the team allows it. The proposal can be named by the team's number [with an "A" or "B" designation for the subsequent team options], or it can be named simply by a numeric. If the team approach is not used, one boundary committee member alone could present numerous options to fulfill his or her specific agenda, without regard to the planning criteria developed by the Board or the Committee. (We have seen numerous of these "renegade" options put forth that do not even place the school of interest in its own attendance zone, but since individuals were allowed to bring options outside of the team process, the entire committee had to address all options brought forth. For one boundary committee, the end result was 90 to 100 options to evaluate, rather than 8 to 10 options, and the entire process fell apart, since the committee members viewed the process as poorly run and as a waste of their time.)

In some cases, such as in socioeconomically or ethnically diverse districts, it may be best for the administration to arrive at two to four options and present those to the boundary

committee. The committee will still develop criteria to evaluate these options and may also be allowed to iteratively make some slight changes to the options. In such a scenario, the administration is the “creator” or “owner” of these options. To use this approach, the district administration should discuss all aspects of these options and their future impacts over an extended period, so that they are imminently informed about the long-term consequences of each option.

If the options are not the best possible options, and if the committee is only allowed to make slight changes to these options, they will feel as though they have been brought in to merely “rubber-stamp” the options, without any real chance for input and without the opportunity to develop the best option. They often then become opponents of the District instead of ambassadors. Thus, options presented to the committee must be highly researched and data driven.

In any case, once the process begins, the meetings should be handled over a short period, and not extended out over a multi-month period. These committee members can discern whether the administration is knowledgeable about the options and they expect meetings to be well-orchestrated with good data for each meeting. There should be a time limit set on the meetings, and they should not be allowed to drag on for hours and hours, as the time of these parents and committee members is also valuable.

Some districts hold pairs of committee meetings, with the same information presented at each meeting, with one meeting held in the afternoon and one held in the evening. This allows for maximum parental involvement and input. However, the resulting committee discussions are always at least slightly different, causing some parents to feel the need to attend all meetings.

The district should consider its policy on adding members to the committee once the process has begun. In some committee structures, where the committee is making decisions and creating options via small teams, it might be desirable to add committee members from certain areas in the District that had not been previously considered for moving. In other cases, especially in structures where the committee is acting in an advisory role (as discussed at the end of this paper), parents may decide later in the process that they want to be on the committee. If they are allowed to do so, inevitably, they will ask questions that have already been answered in previous meetings, thereby slowing the committee process. Some Districts create a slate of committee members, whose job it is to ask questions and participate in the meetings, who agree to make as many of the meetings as possible, but they encourage other parents to sit in on any of the meetings, without an active speaking role, and to ask their questions after the meeting, of the committee members and/or district officials. This keeps the answering of basic questions down to a minimum and makes the committee process flow more smoothly.

HANDLING DISSENT

A top administrator may have to take the occasional committee member, or even a non-participant who is attending the meeting, aside (outside the meeting room), and explain to him/her the necessities of proper etiquette, of the meeting's structure, and of the ultimate goals of the committee, etc. This lead administrator might also have to remind the committee at each meeting that the new zones need to benefit the entire district. Often it is best for the lead administrator to end each committee meeting with inspiring words that emphasize that the entire district will benefit from good boundary planning, etc. (PASA can assist with these concluding remarks by lead administrator.) Occasionally, committees have dissolved into bodies that merely rubber-stamp the self-interested options brought forth by particularly strong members of the committee, and, without a strong administrator to rein in such committee members, the work and goals of the committee are thwarted.

Sometimes, it is useful to bring "enemies" of former attendance zone planning processes onto the boundary committee. This can only be done if the lead administrator is highly respected in the community and highly skilled at handling boundary committees. Ideally, an "enemy" will realize the complexities of boundary planning and will become a convert.

INTRICACIES IN PLANNING THE USE OF SCHOOLS

Do not plan for any school to have under 50% utilization, and ideally not under 60% of its capacity. In high growth districts, or in other special circumstances, however, it might be necessary to create attendance zones with very low levels of utilization initially. With the use of student projections, it is possible to show how rapidly the new school and the other affected schools will increase in student population, and therefore to justify opening a school with a lower level of utilization in order to maximize stability.

(For HIGH SCHOOLS: Keep in mind that high schools can open at a greater level of utilization if the 8th grade is included. This is especially true in high growth districts, where a school might need to be opened with a low level of utilization due to long-term stability concerns. Rather than using a 9th-10th grade configuration or 9th-11th grade plan for the opening year, it can be useful to include the 8th grade if the surrounding middle school zone(s) is also over capacity. This should only be done if an 8th-10th grade-grouping is used, as parents universally decry an 8th-11th grade configuration. If the 8th grade is in a separate wing or pod, the parents seem to like this one-year alteration of grade-groupings for the new high school facility. The use of the 8th grade in a new high school often allows the District to postpone the construction of another middle school for one year, and allows residents to feel that the new high school (and, therefore, their tax dollars) is being well utilized. It is best for student loyalty and student involvement if new high schools are opened with 9th-10th grades or 8th-10th grades only, but many times, for financial or other reasons, this is not feasible, and a 9th through 11th grade configuration is required.)

It is harder to form any new school's zone from within only one existing school zone, since the one current school has to be greatly over capacity in order to allow the formation of two heavily utilized schools the following year. It is much easier to form a new zone from two or more existing school zones, especially at the high school level. When a new school must be created mainly from one existing school's zone, it is important to recognize, and even publicize, the challenge faced in doing this. Such a scenario would be a situation where the new school might open at less than 50% capacity.

Planning for high school boundaries should encompass more meetings than planning for elementary boundaries. Boundary planning for one school should not take more than four meetings at the elementary level, but might take up to six meetings at the high school level. IF the district's administrators provide the initial options and the committee simply helps to refine them or to select from among them, then this process (and the number of meetings) is greatly abbreviated, but this latter approach is sometimes a gamble and can cause the process to fall apart in a worst-case scenario.

Finally, always know where the next school(s) for the relevant grade-group is to be built. Do not plan for this set of new zones without knowing the long-term consequences (for future zones) that this near-term decision will have. Stability is normally listed as a very important criterion in boundary planning, if not *the most* important criterion. Thus, the next set of zones must be at least roughly defined as the boundary committee starts to reach some conclusions about the immediate new zones. Such long range planning not only allows for more student stability, but it does away with any perception that the District is not planning appropriately for any new growth.



THE OPERATION OF A BOUNDARY COMMITTEE 2

The typical Boundary Committee follows the same basic plan for generating attendance zones:

1. Develop basis for establishing attendance zones.
2. Develop data set (oriented to planning units) to understand composition and distribution of students, as well as locations of students with special needs.
3. Develop preliminary zones based on criteria and data.
4. Review and revise attendance zones for schools.
5. Present attendance zones to the public and to Board.

OPERATING ASSUMPTIONS

Often, the District must set some operating assumptions first, to answer important questions (such as optimum school size) before they arise in a committee format. Katy I.S.D. set the following operating assumptions several years ago:

1. Facility core capacity, which includes administrative offices, learning center, cafeteria, gymnasiums and similar common areas should not be used for instruction on a regular basis. Regular teaching stations should be used.
2. Optimal facility capacity, inferred from the Board policy action is:
 - a. 900 -- 1,100 for elementary schools
 - b. 1,100 – 1,400 for middle schools; and
 - c. 3,000 for high schools.
3. Optimal facility utilization is 90% of permanent building capacity (excluding portable classrooms) to make efficient use of existing resources, given the significant increase in small, special program instruction (where fewer than 20 students are housed in a classroom); and to provide reserve capacity for future growth.

4. Plans for proposed schools at all levels should be geared to enrollment projections that are subject to regular review. A demographic update is usually required every one to three years.
5. Attendance boundaries should be drawn on the basis of short-term (at least three years) school enrollment projections rather than current enrollment. This is to minimize the need to redraw at frequent intervals.
6. Whenever possible, fractional feeder rates should not be lower than 15% for elementary-to-middle school, and 25% for middle-to-high school.
7. Optimally, the number of portable classrooms should be limited to 10-15% on all campuses. But, districts have used as much as 15% to 37% over core capacity in elementary schools; 15% - 17% in junior high schools; and 15% to 20% in high schools.
8. Planning Units in the attendance area will ideally, but not necessarily, be contiguous. It may, at times, be necessary to assign non-contiguous land use zones to a new school when the existing school is approaching or exceeding capacity, as well as place students from non-contiguous planning units in new schools as they are opened.
9. In some cases, it may be necessary to create small Planning Units out of apartment complexes and use these apartments to make the best utilization of existing schools. (Apartment complexes where there is a transient student population make the best such entities to transfer to other attendance zones.)

HOLDING BOUNDARY COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The make-up of boundary committees will vary, but they should consist of parents in the potentially affected areas, the principals of the affected schools, and sometimes transportation and/or other district officials. Most often, the district staff members that sit in on the committee are there to answer questions and to offer input, but they do not get to vote on the final option(s), as they do not need to be taking sides in the matter.

If the focus of a committee shifts slightly during the course of the process, and if additional areas come in to question as being potentially affected, it is likely that the committee might need to expand to contain members who represent the newly affected areas.

Some Districts want to open the committees to as many members as possible, so that the best ideas and broadest support come from the committee meetings. This can be both good and bad. If the committee membership is more tightly controlled, and the committee members commit to attending virtually all meetings, then the committee members become very well

informed and very educated about the data, the process, and the options by the end of the series of meetings. If members are allowed to come to any or all of the meetings, and opt to come to only the last few meetings, then they will often be there out of concern or anger – sometimes based on rumor about the committee and the process – and they will not have the benefit of the prior discussions. This makes for repeating of information and re-answering of questions at later committee meetings, slowing down the process. Some districts have a set committee roster, with members who commit to be at as many of the meetings as possible, but they open the meetings to anyone who wishes to come and hear the proceedings. These audience members are not part of the committee, and are, therefore, only allowed to listen and not to participate in the process, but are free at the end of the meeting to ask questions of committee members and staff. This latter approach keeps the committee meetings running efficiently, with a well versed committee making decisions.



ESTABLISHING REZONING CRITERIA IN A BOUNDARY COMMITTEE

3

As noted, the Boundary Planning Committee will identify criteria that are important to them and to the District on the larger scale, before dealing specifically with the attendance zone planning at hand. These criteria will be the critical factors in developing attendance zones and the operating assumptions used in attendance zone planning. First and foremost, boundary criteria for elementary schools can be expected to be different than those for secondary campuses. At least, the ranking of these criteria will be greatly different.

Sometimes the committee creates these criteria on their own; at other times, the criteria are provided to the committee by District staff. The criteria throughout the state are generally the same, but will need to be modified to be district specific. Typically, criteria from one elementary school zoning in a district can be used in future years, but should always be assessed for needed add-ons or changes that are specific to the zoning effort at hand.

AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL, THE TYPICAL CRITERIA WOULD INCLUDE (IN ORDER OF PRIORITY):

- Best use of the capacities of schools, including the utilization, i.e., students projected in each affected zone, not only one year forward, but at least five years forward.
- Neighborhood schools.
- Stability of zones (including the use of portables to maintain stability if necessary).
- Cohesive, contiguous zones that are not gerrymandered and that follow major arterials or natural boundaries, and that do not split subdivisions.
- Socioeconomic balance among the zones, as measured by the percent of free and reduced lunch students. (Also, ethnic balance can be evaluated for information purposes only, but is normally not utilized in attendance zone planning. The reasons for this lie in the following: that parents now are mainly interested in socioeconomic status and not ethnicity; that young persons are now, more than ever before, of more than one ethnic group; that ethnic concerns spawn controversy among boundary committee members, which can be avoided otherwise; and that such controversies can have legal consequences.)
- Often, the last criterion of socioeconomic balance is mutually exclusive from the

concept of neighborhood schools, so that some elementary schools will normally not have a good socioeconomic balance and may also be primarily oriented to one minority group, since neighborhood schools are of predominant importance. Because parental involvement is the chief predictor of academic success, neighborhood schools are seen to have more relevance than socioeconomic balance.

- Consider the special programs and their placement in advance. Try to put these programs in as stable a situation as possible, and not simply place them wherever there is an underutilized facility. Place the special program where there is the greatest concentration of students that is, (if the special program(s) cannot exist in all schools). Finally, as the percent of Hispanic students increase at the district level, it is often important to keep Hispanic Early Learning and PK students, as well as students of all other ethnic groups, at their neighborhood schools, if possible, and not at one or two centralized locations.
- *A feeder concept is discouraged in that it does not make good use of the capacities of individual schools and is not supported by research as either beneficial or harmful either academically or socially. However, special care must be taken to ensure that small slivers or islands of students are not taken from their peer groups and sent to another middle school. In sum, the elementary boundary planning process can often be fairly isolated from the intermediate, middle, or junior high planning processes.*

AT THE MIDDLE SCHOOL OR HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA WOULD BE SIMILAR TO THAT ABOVE, BUT A DIFFERENT RANKING:

- Best use of the capacities of schools, including the utilization, i.e., students projected in affected zones, not only one year forward, but at least five years forward.
- Socioeconomic balance among the zones, as measured by the percent of free and reduced lunch students. (Also, ethnic balance can be evaluated for information purposes only, but is normally not utilized in attendance zone planning. The reasons for this lie in the following: that parents now are mainly interested in socioeconomic status and not ethnicity; that young persons are now, more than ever before, of more than one ethnic group; that ethnic concerns spawn controversy among boundary committee members, which can be avoided otherwise; and that such controversies can have legal consequences.)
- Cohesive, contiguous zones that are not gerrymandered and that follow major arterials or natural boundaries, and that do not split subdivisions.
- Stability of zones (including the use of portables to maintain stability if necessary).

OTHER IMPORTANT CRITERIA TO CONSIDER:

1. Schools should be similar in terms of facilities, programs, and faculty.

2. It is better to put a portable building at a school than to divide a neighborhood arbitrarily when the student body becomes too large for one school.
3. Some schools, where the surrounding neighborhood is not expected to grow, can have a higher percent occupancy than schools in growing neighborhoods.
4. Socioeconomic balance is desired at the Secondary school level. Socioeconomic balance can typically be estimated based on the percent of students in the free and reduced lunch program in each Planning Unit, which correlates closely with median housing values and median household income.
5. Ideally, students should not have to travel beyond the nearest school.
6. Elementary school students should ideally attend a school within one mile of their homes, avoiding barriers (highways, railroads, etc.) wherever possible.
7. New attendance zone boundaries for elementary schools will generate much more concern than new junior high boundaries because the elementary school boundaries have a more direct effect on parents and on neighborhoods.
8. When there is a scarcity of special education, of bilingual, or of Pre-K students within some planning units, special education, bilingual or Pre-K classes need not be located in every school. Special, bilingual, and Pre-K programs should be located in "magnet" schools where possible to maximize specialization and to achieve socioeconomic balance.
9. Regardless of grade level groupings and attendance zone definitions in a district, some portion of the public will not be pleased with the overall plan or specified aspects of the plan.
10. Current attendance zones should be retained whenever possible because stability is important to the perceived quality of a school district.



SAMPLE CRITERIA FOR USE BY A BOUNDARY COMMITTEE 4

By using the above criteria and tailoring them to the specified district, Boundary Planning Committees across the state have developed the following sets of assumptions. These were generated by various districts, including Katy I.S.D., Clear Creek I.S.D., Galveston I.S.D., Bryan I.S.D., Allen I.S.D., Lamar C.I.S.D., Fort Bend I.S.D., and Mansfield I.S.D.

SET 1:

- Affecting the least number of students with zone changes.
- Maintain a neighborhood concept.
- Remain within 86-90 percent of permanent operating capacity where possible.
- Acknowledge and utilize projections of student growth for the next five years – to retain new zones for the longest possible time.
- Consider bus pickup and bus routing to optimize routes and minimize the number of buses.
- At this time, transfers are not considered, but will be evaluated on separate spreadsheets.
- Consider number of bilingual classes needed per school to utilize a neighborhood concept for bilingual programs.
- Consider, where possible, parental and neighborhood concerns that have been evidenced in past attendance zone planning.
- Give special consideration to any neighborhoods that have had attendance zone realignments in the past three years.

SET 2:

- Designation and location of central programs are not part of this process. Examples of such programs are: Bilingual, Special Education, Gifted and Talented, Early Childhood.

- Efforts should be directed toward the adoption of a plan that will provide three to five years minimum stability for the newly designated attendance area. Exceptions might be made for the anticipated opening of new schools.
- Of necessity, some schools will become split feeder patterns. Efforts should be made to minimize this effect as new attendance areas are identified.
- Grandfathering in existing elements of attendance zones, or designated grade levels is not anticipated.
- Contiguous attendance areas are preferable but not mandatory, Exceptions require strong justification.
- Transportation distance is not a limiting factor for determining the size of an attendance area.
- Consideration will be given to further sub-dividing of planning units.
- Committee will provide recommendations; the Board of Trustees will make final decisions regarding attendance zones.

SET 3:

- Balancing student enrollment.
- Minimizing transportation (home close to school).
- Maintaining contiguous attendance areas.
- Avoid splitting neighborhoods.
- Providing 3-5 year enrollment stability.
- Maintaining feeder patterns.
- Consider natural boundaries and hazards.
- Anticipated zone adjustments to be considered with the opening of future new schools.
- Moving as few students as possible.
- Volunteers in schools.
- Honoring past Board promises.

SET 4:

Middle, Junior or High Schools:

- Optimize facility utilization.
- Maintain feeder patterns, Middle or Jr.-High School to High School.
- Move as few students as possible.
- Provide 2-3 year enrollment stability.
- Avoid Splitting neighborhoods.
- Maintain contiguous attendance zones.
- Anticipate future attendance zones.
- Avoid moving students two years in a row.

Elementary Schools:

- Minimize the number of students moved.
- Provide 3-5 year stability of attendance zones.
- Maximize utilization of facilities.
- Minimize transportation (closest to school).
- Feeder patterns considered (least disruption).
- Consider entrances/exits of subdivisions.
- Avoid splitting neighborhoods.
- Allow for growth at each facility
- Consider projected subdivision growth.
- Balance student enrollment.
- Maintaining contiguous attendance areas.

SET 5:

- Attention to walk zones/avoidance of crossing major thoroughfares when possible/bussing issues.
- Try to avoid splitting neighborhoods/cohesiveness is important.
- Important to leave extra space in high growth areas and to fill to near capacity the schools in low growth areas (will need to chart areas of highest projected growth).
- Consider feeder schools as boundaries are prepared.
- Attention to socio-economic and ethnicity status.
- Consider sub-populations such as bilingual education.

SET 6:

- Utilize school facilities in the most efficient way possible; to include full utilization within designated functional capacity and leaving room in schools for projected growth.
- Students attend the school closest to where they live that will minimize transportation costs and time.
- As far as possible, achieve socio-economic diversity across the District.
- Attempt to keep neighborhoods together.
- Minimize the use of portables.
- Consider/Examine existing barriers (railroad crossings, waterways, highways, etc.) to minimize hazardous conditions.
- Every effort will be made to limit the number of times boundary revisions will cause students to be moved during their tenure in a primary or secondary educational setting.
- Grandfathering is not normally considered when making boundary revisions. Each situation will be considered individually and based on pertinent data. This includes grandfathering of siblings.

SET 7:

- Utilize the neighborhood school for elementary campuses and the feeder school philosophy by designating specific elementary campuses to assigned middle schools.
- Staff and the committee will use the most recent enrollment projection data for the annual demographic report.
- The boundary change should optimize school facility usage and accommodate growth patterns throughout the District.
- A campus capacity should not include portable classroom space that is considered temporary.
- Programs for special population groups should be considered in relation to capacity issues.
- Fiscal impact on staffing, transportation and building capacity must be considered.
- The District believes demographic diversity enriches our community and the committee should embrace this philosophy in its analysis of feeder school scenarios.

SET 8:

- The Geographical proximity of students to schools, and will make efforts to minimize driving time and driving distance
- The school feeder systems, and will make efforts to reduce the number of schools that a school feeds into
- School capacities
- The enrollment projections over the next five years, and will make efforts to maximize the time before schools reach enrollment capacity
- The use of thoroughfares, creeks, easements, and other structures for delineating changes in attendance zones
- Input from the community advisory committees and the general community, including e-mail and written correspondence
- The recommendations should not be based on any singular issue, but should be based on all relevant information.

SET 9:

- Draw attendance zones in a way that supports an efficient/effective use of school facilities
- Align the number of students (enrollment) with campus capacity
- Reduced overcrowding of campuses
- Plan for future growth
- Keep neighborhoods and feeder schools tracking together, as much as possible
- Minimize rezoning neighborhoods that have been affected in previous rezonings
- Draw zones which reflect the diversity of the district, as much as possible
- Consider students' proximity to a campus, being mindful of traffic patterns that allow for the safest routes available.
- Involve the community in defining the objectives/criteria for rezoning
- Develop a fair and objective rezoning process
- Keep in mind doing what is in the best interest of students
- Communicate zoning information effectively to all students and families that may be impacted.

SET 10:

- Draw attendance zones in a way that supports an efficient/effective use of school facilities.
- Reduce overcrowding of campuses
- Plan for future growth
- Keep neighborhoods and feeder schools tracking together, as much as possible.
- Minimize rezoning neighborhoods which have been affected in previous rezonings
- Draw secondary zones which reflect the diversity of the district, as much as possible.
- Consider elementary students' proximity to a campus, being mindful of traffic patterns that allow for the safest routes available
- Involve the community in defining the objectives/criteria for rezoning
- Develop a fair and objective rezoning process
- Keep in mind doing what is in the best interest of students
- Communicate zoning information effectively to all students and families that may be impacted
- Consider fiscal impact of changes



OTHER APPROACHES TO REZONING

5

Some Districts find that bypassing the boundary committee process partially or altogether is more effective than spending the extra cost and time selecting a committee and formulating approaches used in the committee. But, not all Districts are equipped with a strong and knowledgeable champion who can lead the District without a boundary committee. Each District must make the decision to have or not to have a boundary committee based on particular strengths and weaknesses within the administration and the District population.

USING AN ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM INSTEAD OF A BOUNDARY COMMITTEE

Boundary committees are not always successful. Sometimes, strong, self-interested parties can overwhelm a boundary committee, forcing through a rezoning option that is not forward thinking and which does not solve long-term problems for the District. If such a situation arises, when additional rezoning needs to be completed, a new committee will then have to struggle with repairing what the initial committee created, all the while attempting to maintain maximum student stability and while trying to ensure that it is acting in the interest of the District as a whole, instead of falling prey to self-interests. Often, if one boundary committee acts based on self-interest and a later committee attempts to remedy the acts of the first committee, students are relocated more than one time. This can create, in the minds of the public, a perception that the District is not planning well and is not forward thinking, when, in reality, it is the committee members themselves that caused the problem.

OPTION 1: ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM ONLY

Some Districts opt to complete the entire attendance zone planning process with little to no public input. Administrators who are strong leaders and who have worked in the District for an extensive period of time are necessary if a boundary committee will not be appointed. This is due to the fact that, when the Administration acts unilaterally, there will typically be public outcries from one or more interest groups, since very few parents are willing to relocate their children from their current schools without a true understanding of the necessity of the move. The District will need to be sure that there is a strong “point person” within the Administration that has (1) a very strong knowledge of the demographic data; and (2) rigorous rationales for the one option chosen, and for the other options which were not. This person must be willing to answer questions, to make explanations, and to act on behalf of the District — often in a

very emotionally charged situation once public input is sought.

If a District chooses to go this route, the District superintendent, or lead administrator, will usually select a "demographic team" consisting of other administrative directors and necessary consultants for attendance zone planning. This team typically consists of the lead administrator, the communications director, the Building/Facilities Director, an internal demographer if applicable, and an external demographer. Coaches/UII experts and/or transportation officials might also be involved, depending on the District and the rezoning need. This demographic team will meet one to three times to discuss various options for rezoning. Such a team can normally meet fewer times than a standard boundary committee because the team members should have an inherent knowledge of many of the issues pertinent to the rezoning discussion, and they should also bring fewer self-interests to the discussion. At the final meeting, when one or two final options are decided upon, it is important for the group to list, for their later use, the pros and cons of the final option(s), and to list why specific options were addressed but later discarded.

The public's input is minimal when the administration is in charge of the attendance zone planning. After the "demographic team" creates options for attendance zones, they present their final option (or two options if there is a specific set of neighborhoods in question) at a School Board workshop where the Board is free to ask questions — and thus understand the nuances of the decision before them. After the workshop, the Board may again hear the topic at a regular meeting, and, at this point, letters are normally sent out to all parents affected by the attendance zone change. The Board and Administration then hold one or more public hearings the following month for questions and answers.

The District must, in advance, decide how it will respond to public input, criticism, and requests for additional information. If the Administration chooses to answer questions and to respond directly to members of the public, it is possible that the meeting will dissolve into heated argument instead of rational discussion. A much-preferred and more professional approach is to begin the public hearing by having an administrator and member of the demographic team give a brief presentation about the option, why the option was chosen, and why other options were discarded. Each member of the public is then given 3-5 minutes to speak, during which time the Board and/or Administration takes notes about the speakers' concerns. Most important, it is not appropriate to try to respond to any comments or even to questions. A vehicle by which additional information requested by the public can later be provided needs to be in place prior to the public hearing. It is typical that one demographic team member is responsible for gathering the requests for additional information and for getting those requests filled.

After the opportunity for public input, the plan is typically reevaluated by the Administration, based on the public input. A final recommendation is then sent to the Board at the following Board meeting, and a Board vote is then taken on the option.

This method works best if the District is equipped with strong and unbiased administrators. A

top administrator with a strong personality and long tenure will be able to handle questions and concerns very well. Also, when members of the demographic team truly have no reason to treat any school preferentially, a better, more stable plan can be enacted. An unbiased team of administrators can quickly make decisions based on their knowledge of the District's geography, school capacities, and demographic framework. This powerful group of administrators understands how short-term and long-term impacts affect future zoning decisions.

OPTION 2: HYBRID MODEL: USING ADMINISTRATORS AND PUBLIC SUPPORT

Some Districts choose to go with a hybrid approach, utilizing both the administration and the public. In this situation, an initial meeting is held with administration and staff members. A demographic consultant with a strong dataset—regarding demographic data at the subdivision and apartment level, as well as projections of growth and decline for each neighborhood -- is usually present to speed the process along. Before the initial meeting is held, the demographic consultant can work in conjunction with an administrator to develop several “starter options.” These “starter options” are then presented at the first meeting, and the administration and staff members have the opportunity to tweak the initial options based on their unique concerns, prior to opening the options up to a citizen group. In this case, it is important to have as part of the committee the principals of the affected schools so that specific concerns can be addressed. One or more additional meetings will be needed to address any particular concerns and to finalize the option, with the number of necessary meetings being dependent upon the complexity of the rezoning issue.

After the initial administrative meetings are held, parents and teachers are then invited to give their input on the boundary options. Anywhere from 1-3 small meetings are held, depending on the situation. Based on the complexity of the zoning issue at hand, either “tweaking” the options, or generating new options is allowed at this point, although the goal of the initial committee meetings was to address any logical changes and to have looked at the results caused by making changes to the given options. It is an important role of the group facilitator to guide the number of options allowed and to keep the requested changes to a reasonable number, as too many options will do nothing but bog down a committee.

Under such a scenario, it is not always necessary for the committee to come to consensus on one option, but they might instead narrow it down to 2-3 options. The district may decide to treat the role of the committee as advisory in nature, instead of as a decision-making force. This makes the meetings more relaxed and more open, as there is not an adversarial relationship created between the administration and committee members who desire a contrary option. It also allows the committee members to not feel the need to convince all other committee members of their position, assuming that the administration will see theirs as the stronger argument, over the opposing viewpoint. If the committee is treated as advisory, the administrative team then makes the final decision on a preferred option, based on input from the committee. In such a situation, the initial committee meetings might be less

adversarial, but the administration will have to be prepared to potentially face strident opposition at the public hearings from those parents with a differing viewpoint.

Once an option has been decided upon, the decision is taken to the Board, where it is presented at a regular meeting. Public hearing(s) are then typically held, to allow a wider range of members of the public to have input and to voice concerns. These public hearings can either be held as a part of the regular board meeting, if little concern and input is expected, or they can be held as separate meetings if a great deal of input is expected. If they are held outside the regular board meeting, it is important for one or more of the Board members to be present to hear the concerns of the public.

After the public hearings, the broad committee can then meet again to address any concerns from the public hearing. The final option is decided upon and sent to the Board as a final recommendation. A Board vote is then held on the option.



SPECIAL CONCERNS IN HIGH SCHOOL PLANNING

6

ATTENDANCE ZONE PLANNING FOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN DIVERSE SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Most districts creating a second high school are interested in comparable schools, especially in regard to the quality of both facilities and equal sizes of the two schools. Typically, there has to be a perception of equal facilities, equal faculty, and equal access to all extra-curricular activities and to special programs. At the same time, it may be necessary to have magnet schools or better facilities at some minority locations, such as computers for every class or superior facilities in order to provide acceptable neighborhood schools.

Ideally, diverse (non-homogeneous) school districts moving to two high school zones should have equal zones socioeconomically. Unfortunately, if one zone has more than 7 to 10 percent difference in free and reduced lunch students when the zone vote is taken, then the two zones immediately begin to change and one zone becomes oriented to more upper socioeconomic (SES) students and one to lower socioeconomic students.

Also, if the zones are equally balanced, but one zone contains the lowest and the highest SES, then those parents in the highest SES neighborhoods will begin working almost immediately to get the zones changed, or an uneasy alliance exists throughout the time period of this type of zone (ex: Wichita Falls).

Finally, if only a sliver of upper SES students exists in an attendance zone, rather than a sizeable number, then the parents will begin working to get the zones changed. For this one sliver, housing values will fall overnight, once the zone is formed with this sliver in a lower SES zone.

If zones for two schools are not balanced socioeconomically, then housing values will fall for the entire district to some extent, because the entire district becomes stereotyped negatively due to having one lower SES school.

It is not a good idea to incorporate ethnicity in attendance zone planning, for two reasons: (1) parents primarily have an interest in the SES characteristics of the students with whom their children are associating; and (2) a concentration on ethnicity leads to law suits.

A diverse district which has not had boundary committees to plan attendance zones and is perceived as having a highly regarded administration may decide to plan the zones in-house. However, it is ideal to have a boundary committee where teams (not individuals) make suggestions about new zones.

Typically, diverse districts have great difficulty in planning high school zones; homogeneous districts have little difficulty in planning high school zones.

HIGH SCHOOLS WITHOUT ATTENDANCE ZONES

Typically, schools without zones either have to remain very specialized, such as an alternative campus, or else parents have concerns with the fact that the schools are dissimilar in programs, in faculty, or socioeconomically. In sum, one school is perceived to be of higher quality in one or more ways than the other school(s).

When a new high school is formed, even if it is a very specialized facility, upper SES parents will begin to institute change for the most opportune facility to become a more homogeneous, upper SES facility. In sum, plans to develop one small school with specialized focuses and a second, large school with a strong core and multiple specializations may fail within a few years due to the passionate nature of parental concerns about their children in socioeconomically diverse classrooms.

For example, if school is built in an upper SES portion of the District, it may be planned to provide for a smaller, specialized student population. However, within a few years (potentially as few as five years), the future Board and administration may not have the same interest, or abilities, to maintain the same philosophy as the current Board and administration. This new school will likely become a conventional second campus with attendance zones oriented to upper SES students. Thus, whatever new facilities are built, keep in mind that the location is of tremendous importance in that the new facility will be used in whatever manner is deemed important at that time.

In sum, facility usage may be changed in as little as five years. And, in a diverse district, change in the original intent of the new campus can be expected to occur, especially if "choice" is involved in the initial plan or Board vote.

A new school can have (a) choice, (b) lottery or random selection, or (c) attendance zones, or some combination of these three. The location of a new school can never be altered. Thus, it is extremely important to have a new school that can have an acceptable student composition which will not likely be changed through time.

Also, ingress and egress is extremely important. If the ingress and egress does not already exist at a potential site, it can be very costly for the District to make the necessary improvements. TxDot and the City or County are often less than willing to aid the District in developing the necessary traffic improvements.

UIL CONCERNS IN TIMING OF NEW FACILITIES

Prepared by Dr. Rick Reedy, Frisco I.S.D. –

Timing of the creation of new zones at the high school level: The decision concerning which grade configuration to use when growing Texas public school districts open an additional senior high school campus is a difficult and complex one. Although space utilization and curricular/co-curricular program equity are the most significant issues, the access to varsity competition in University Interscholastic League competition for upper grade level (junior/senior) students is an important consideration in most districts. Since the University Interscholastic League reclassifies and realigns only every two years (with the first year of the district alignment being in an even numbered year [example: 2004-2005]), high schools opening with either Grades 9-12 or Grades 9-11 in odd numbered years (example: 2005-2006) would be unable to compete in a district competition in some team sports because the campus did not exist to be assigned to a district in the previous year. In many communities, this situation would not set well with parents of the students affected. Therefore, many growing districts opening a new senior high school choose to open, if feasible, in even numbers years regardless of the grade configuration. Sometimes campuses opening in odd numbered years choose to open with Grades 9-10.



NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS VS. ETHNICALLY BALANCED SCHOOLS

7

The Boundary Planning Committee is often faced with the decision of whether or not to maintain socioeconomically and ethnically balanced schools or to create neighborhood schools. For the past twenty years, Texas school districts, as well as districts throughout the nation, have concentrated on neighborhood schools, particularly at the elementary level, rather than ethnically balanced attendance zones, which historically had been the emphasis.

At the high school level and the middle school level, diverse districts with few secondary schools place a heavy emphasis on socioeconomic (and to a minor extent, ethnic balance), rather than simply the proximity of students, i.e., neighborhood schools. In districts with a diverse or largely minority student population that have a large number of secondary schools, these districts tend to revert back to more neighborhood-oriented attendance zone concepts.

The busing of students, primarily minority students, and the lack of parental involvement with non-neighborhood schools, has provided an impetus for the past two decades to return to neighborhood schools at the elementary level. Perhaps most importantly, minority parents are requesting this change, because they feel it provides a better educational environment and greater chance for involvement. Since parental involvement is the chief predictor of academic success, then the neighborhood school concept appears to be of first or second in importance.

There are also some drawbacks to neighborhood schools: there has to be a perception of equal facilities, equal faculty, and equal access to all extra-curricular activities and to special programs. If this cannot be provided by the district over the long term, than neighborhood schools are not viewed as positively. At the same time, it may be necessary to have magnet schools or better facilities at some minority locations, such as computers for every class or superior facilities in order to provide acceptable neighborhood schools.

It is a mistake to portray and treat diverse districts as if they are homogeneous districts, in that there cannot be, and will never be, the same types of considerations in planning the student populations for each facility. Thus, as a school district plans for attendance zones or programs within schools to create diversity within each school, the diverse district will face many more obstacles and has more obligations to plan for a diverse environment.