

March 24, 2009

Board addressing enrollment

Iowa City School District Board of Directors

Guest opinion

The Iowa City School District takes great pride in its two outstanding comprehensive high schools, City High and West High. The school board is committed to supporting the continued excellence of both of these great high schools. To that end, the time has come for the community to engage in candid discussion regarding issues related to current and projected high school enrollment and the impact these enrollment patterns may have on school boundaries and school facilities.

In 2007-08, the board adopted a high school enrollment policy whereby all new-to-the-district students were assigned to City High. This policy was intended as a short-term plan for managing enrollment between the schools -- using available capacity at City to stabilize enrollment at both schools and reduce overcrowding at West. The policy was modified for the 2008-09 school year to assign only new-to-the-district 11th- and 12th-graders to City High. The board recognizes the shortcomings of this policy and thinks that it does not represent a durable solution to high school enrollment issues.

The board understands that any plan for dealing with high school enrollment must involve the input and support of the community. The board also recognizes that current enrollment projections dictate that decisions are made in a timely manner. In response to these concerns, the board recently adopted the following process:

1. A community task force is being formed to study and respond to critical high school enrollment questions, including:

- How large do we want our high schools to be?
- What degree of disparity and size between the two schools is permissible?
- What specific options are available and on what timeline for implementation?

Decision-making will remain with the board; however, the task force will be an important venue for gathering community input, developing ideas and formulating a statement of community values and priorities. The task force will report to the board by May.

2. A community forum will be at 7 p.m. Monday at Parkview Church, 15 Foster Road, Iowa City. The school district will provide a brief overview of high school enrollment projections and capacity issues. The remainder of the forum will be a time for community members to express their views regarding the district's appropriate response. The forum will be an opportunity for members of the community to share their views with the task force and with the board. (Note: Because of scheduling conflicts, there will not be a forum Saturday.)

As the school community wrestles with these important issues, the board's focus will be on the continued excellence of both City and West.
