

# **Boundary changes necessary for district**

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It is becoming more and more evident that large portions of our community are in favor not only of exploring the option of building a third high school in the north corridor but also of making this school a reality within the next eight years.

The high school enrollment task force has made this recommendation to the superintendent and has been called back to work to determine how our district will get to this point. To date, there have been two proposals put forth to the task force -- one by Northwest Junior High principal Gregg Shoultz and another by the Advocates for North Corridor High Schools group. Although both proposals offer methods of managing our student population until the third high school can be operational, they fail when attempting to address the most basic question posed to the high school enrollment task force and the most important question for current east side families: "How different do we want our two comprehensive high schools to be in terms of student population size, course offerings and student composition before the new high school opens?"

It is clear that in order to answer this question, we must cast aside our old notions of east side and west side and open our discussion to the one solution that will provide not only a balance to the current differences between our comprehensive high schools, but also additional time to determine how to fund the new school: boundary changes.

## **Sharing Challenges**

City High School prides itself on teaching every student every day. However, an increase in the percentage of students in need has certainly presented challenges to our building. At the beginning of the 2008-09 school year, City High had a free and reduced lunch population of 26 percent while West High had a free and reduced population of 17 percent. It must be recognized that these

students require more resources in terms of time, teachers and programs.

At City High, we have implemented numerous programs over the past two years to allow us to continue to teach every student every day. We are proud of the fact that these programs, an outstanding teaching staff and supportive parents have allowed City High to remain the only secondary school in our district that is not on the federal "Schools in Need of Assistance" list.

While City High is clearly up to the challenge, we also believe that these challenges should be shared among all of our high schools. A boundary change is the only way in which these percentages can be balanced.

## **Disparities**

The east side community is uncomfortable with the current disparity of 400 students between City High and West High. Current proposals for dealing with the district's increased high school population still allow for an imbalance of up to 730 students between City High and West High before a new high school is built in 2017. This is clearly unacceptable.

A disparity of this magnitude will make it virtually impossible to provide comparable curricular offerings at both schools, which will place City High students at a disadvantage. A disparity of this magnitude also will place our music, debate, academic teams and athletic teams at a distinct disadvantage because of having fewer students involved in our programs.

## **Changing Boundaries**

Certainly a logical solution to both of these issues is to implement some sort of boundary change beginning with the 2010-11 school year. Unlike some have suggested, boundary changes have been advocated by the Iowa City community since at least 2000 to address capacity issues, balance of students in need, and odd attendance areas. Moving just 30-50 students per year from the current

West High attendance area to the current City High attendance area will not only address the two issues outlined above, it also will delay the predicted overcrowding at West High out to nearly 2014.

Working through the changes our district is going through will require difficult decisions and careful deliberation, of this there is no doubt. However, it also will require us to think differently. We can no longer afford to maintain the current east-west boundaries that have become "traditional." We must be willing to explore our current attendance areas in the context of the current enrollment situation and make decisions that will guarantee that both high schools remain the outstanding schools that they are.

The Iowa City community can no longer afford to maintain the status quo. There is too much at stake.