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Petition calls for high school boundary changes

*Rob Daniel
Iowa City Press-Citizen*

A parents' group is organizing a petition calling for the Iowa City School District to redraw its boundaries for City High and West High.

Citizens for Outstanding Public Education in Iowa, or COPE-Iowa, is calling for phased boundary changes and a policy to keep the number of teachers at City High to the level it is at this year. It also is asking the district to assign all high school students new to the district to City High. The policy, in place during the 2007-08 school year but revised this year to move only juniors and seniors, would ease overcrowding at West High and keep the number of teachers at City High stable, they said.

Ed Stone, a City High parent and steering committee member for COPE-Iowa, said the petition had gathered about 450 signatures as of Thursday morning, with representation from every elementary school attendance area in the district. He said the issue of maintaining equity between the two high schools was an important one for parents, and was one that should have been dealt already with exploring boundary changes every three to four years rather than just when a new school opens.

"The issue is exactly the same as it was four or five years ago, in that we're not taking any action," he said. "What is happening now is we're letting the schools become different because we're keeping the boundaries the same."

Stone said the parents are hoping to present the petition to school board members at a public forum on high school enrollment issues, set for 7 p.m. Monday at Parkview Church.

The high school enrollment issue has been at the forefront for the district for the last several years. Growth on the district's west side, particularly in the North Corridor area, led to West High reaching its capacity of 1,800 students. Enrollment at City High has been decreasing slowly since the 2001-02 school year, when 1,562 students were enrolled. Following an upswing to 1,507 students last year that included 44 new students assigned to City High because West High was closed to new students, the district reported an official enrollment of 1,379 students at City High in October 2008.

School board president Toni Cilek said both high schools remain equal despite differences. For instance, about 25 percent of City High's students receive free or reduced-price lunches, compared to about 19 percent at West High. She said the school board wants to get more input from the public about how to address the concerns and what actions it should take, including adding more classrooms to West High while holding on a third high school in the North Corridor area. This comes at a time when the district is looking at ways to cut \$6 million from its budget over the next two years.

"(The high schools are) reaching their capacity, but they're not at a crisis point," Cilek said. "We were anticipating that a third high school would be the solution to that, but that doesn't appear the case."

Additional Facts

If you go

What: Public forum on high school enrollment issues in the Iowa City School District

When: 7 p.m. Monday

Where: Parkview Church, 15 Foster Road