

March 27, 2009

Petition calls for adjusting boundaries

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 at current levels. 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 organizers have gathered about 450 signatures as of Thursday morning, with representation from all 18 elementary schools. He said the issue of maintaining equity between the two high schools is an important one for parents. He said the district should look at boundary changes every three to four years rather than acting only when a new school opens, Stone said.

"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 petition can be found online at www.copeiowa.org.

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 such as about 25 percent of City High's students receiving free or reduced-price lunches, compared with 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. The issue comes at a time when the district is looking at ways to cut \$6 million from its budget in 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.
-