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## Parents flood meeting

### Offer diverse enrollment opinions

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*Iowa City Press-Citizen*

More than 450 people showed up to give their opinions Monday night at a forum on high school enrollment in the Iowa City School District at Parkview Church.

Discussion ranged from whether the district should build a third high school sooner than later to how the district can ensure there are equal opportunities for students at both City High and West High. The issue has come to the forefront in recent years as West High's enrollment has climbed to its capacity of 1,800 students as Iowa City's west side and the North Corridor continue to grow.

Superintendent Lane Plugge said both high schools have had high achievers, with each scoring among the best in the country on the Iowa Test of Educational Development and on the ACT. However, while City High's enrollment is expected to remain stable at 1,400 to 1,500 students during the next 10 years, West High's enrollment could climb to as high as 2,500 students by 2017, associate superintendent Jim Behle said.

At the same time, a third high school in the North Corridor has dropped in immediacy as the district wrestles with budget issues during the next several years, school board president Toni Cilek said. Plugge said it would cost the district about \$1.9 million per year to run a new 800-student high school.

"That's not off the table," Cilek said. "But we need to caution people that that is a fiscal obligation we would have."

Some of the 50 people who commented urged district officials to either adjust boundaries and to establish policies to keep more teachers in place.

Ed Stone, a City High and member of Citizens for Outstanding Public Education in Iowa, or COPE-Iowa, presented a petition with 742 names asking the district to adjust boundaries and send high school students new to the district to City High while they waited for the third high school to be built. He also said he wanted to ensure students at both high schools got the same opportunities to take different classes.

"I think we need to act immediately to stop the loss of teachers from City High and overcrowding at West High," Stone said.

Some parents in North Liberty said they were disappointed at the loss in immediacy in building a third high school in their area. Mitch Beckman, a member of COPE-Iowa and a North Liberty resident, said some parents in the North Corridor are looking at other options if a third high school is not built in the near future because of crowding at West High and safety concerns.

"It's so important that I would consider sending my kids to Clear Creek Amana, Solon or Regina if we don't get a third high school," he said.

Thad Collins, a parent of children at Wickham Elementary, said he was concerned about the safety of students who would drive from the North Corridor to City High or West High, especially because many would likely drive on Interstate 80 to get to school.

"I think we're looking at something dire if we send kids on I-80," he said.

Others urged the five school board members who attended and Plugge to take their time in making a decision. They included parent Marguerite Oetting, who said the district should examine achievement gaps at the elementary level before making a decision on the high school issue.

"I thought we had concluded there was going to be a third high school," she said. "If we make decisions immediately as demanded by some, then we don't get the thought-out solution. We don't want to make any mistakes."

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