

March 12, 2016

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the School Committee,

As you know, the Superintendent's Ad Hoc Student Assignment Committee was charged last summer with studying the existing and planned near-term (SY2016-17) capacity of Lexington's elementary schools. The aim is to recommend student assignment options to the Superintendent that utilize available classrooms across the school district while allowing for flexibility for growth that has been difficult to predict at the school level.

For the past eight months, our Committee - made up of two parent representatives from each elementary school, along with Superintendent Mary Czajkowski, Assistant Superintendent Carol Pilarski, and Director of Planning and Assessment Maureen Kavanaugh - has met regularly, coming to consensus on guiding principles around student assignment, discussing the town's geography and the boundaries of neighborhoods, and the needs, desires and assets of each school community.

With the hiring of AppGeo this winter, the pace of our Committee's work accelerated as the consultants brought deep expertise and access to data and tools that were not previously available to us. We have discussed approaches from other towns facing enrollment increases and – this past week – looked at a number of possible scenarios for changing student enrollment in Lexington. **Based on the data and maps we have seen, it is clear to our Committee that buffer zones are necessary for Lexington to respond flexibly to an unpredictable enrollment future.**

A buffer zone is defined as a specified area between two or more school assignment areas that permits individual addresses to be assigned to two or more schools. All other assignment area lines are fixed and students living within these boundaries are assigned to one school based on address.

The unique benefit of buffer zones is they allow us to utilize currently available space, without risking that a permanent change to a district boundary will cause significant overcrowding at the receiving school. For instance, Estabrook currently has two to three classrooms available but the school's annual growth rate of 2.4% since 2007-08 is the second highest in town, and anecdotally we know that significant building is happening in the Estabrook district as families seek to move into the district with the newest school building. A buffer zone could allow us to place students at Estabrook for fall 2016, but in later years incoming students – new to Lexington Public Schools – could be assigned where there is space if Estabrook reaches its capacity.

We recognize that buffer zones are a new approach to student assignment in Lexington and there is concern that the town would lose its "neighborhood

schools”. Our Committee feels strongly that all of Lexington’s schools offer an excellent education with educational and programmatic parity across the school district. A small number of clearly defined buffer zones is the only way to provide school district administration the tools to manage and balance enrollment and ensure that educational parity continues.

Our voices represent the School Based Site Councils and PTAs of all six elementary schools. And although any student assignment – and redistricting – conversation is difficult, we as a committee are in full support of clearly defined buffer zones as a reasonable and flexible approach to student enrollment.

Thank you.
Signed,

The Superintendent’s Ad Hoc Student Assignment Committee

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Cathy Swan, Bowman School
Laura Schroeder, Bridge School
Mark Maguire, Bridge School

Karen Griffiths, Estabrook School
Gretchen Reisig, Estabrook School
Daniel Voss, Fiske School
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