

March 2016



Superintendent's Newsletter Lexington Public Schools

Student Assignment

Dear Community Members,

As part of an ongoing effort to address the impact of increased student enrollment, the Lexington Public Schools has formed a Student Assignment Committee comprised of parents, administration, school committee members, and our consultant Applied Geographics (AppGeo).

This edition of my newsletter is devoted to communicating the ongoing work of the Student Assignment Committee and its purpose to the community of Lexington.

We have experienced a 15% increase in elementary students since 2008 while some areas of town are growing at higher rates than others causing space constraints.

Parents have been involved in the process from the onset and will continue to play a crucial role. I encourage you to contact members of the Student Assignment Committee or a member of administration to voice your comments, concerns, or questions; and we have established a web site for additional information:

<http://lps.lexingtonma.org/Page/5740>

Student Assignment Committee Members

- *Bill Hurley*, School Committee Chair
- *Judy Crocker*, School Committee
- *Mary Czajkowski*, Superintendent
- *Carol Pilarski*, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Learning
- *Maureen Kavanaugh*, Director of Planning and Assessment
- *Alison Stevens*, Bowman SBSC
- *Cathy Swan*, Bowman SBSC
- *Mark McGuire*, Bridge SBSC
- *Laura Schroeder*, Bridge SBSC
- *Karen Griffiths*, Estabrook PTA
- *Gretchen Reisig*, Estabrook
- *Jeanine Ferrick*, Fiske PTA
- *Dan Voss*, Fiske SBSC
- *Elaine Ashton*, Harrington
- *Julie Fuhrer*, Harrington
- *Curt Barrentine*, Hastings SBSC
- *Sharon Musto*, Hastings PTA

In Consultation with....

Kate Hickey and Priya Sankalia, Applied Geographics

School Committee

Elementary Principals

Transportation Department

Have feedback or ideas? We would love to hear them at:

<https://goo.gl/dzNHfl>



Ad Hoc Student Assignment Committee

Student Assignment Considerations

- A. Provide targeted relief to schools with space constraints and large class sizes.
- B. Maintain class size guidelines across the system with a focus on creating equitable class sizes across all elementary schools.
- C. Regain and maintain dedicated classroom space for art, music, special education, and English Language Learner programs.
- D. Explore the use of buffer zones as a tool to manage future enrollment growth.
- E. Take into account major roadways and any traffic implications that will have an impact on the safety of students. Maximize walkability with a goal to aligning to "complete street" policy.
- F. Maximize geographical continuity by respecting the geographic boundaries of existing neighborhoods.
- G. Minimize the impact of any change on current students (i.e., explore options such as the grandfathering of current students and families).
- H. Redistrict an address only once in 6 years (current policy is 5 years).
- I. Consider impact of elementary student assignment on middle school feeder patterns.
- J. Consider capacity of core spaces (cafeteria, library, gym, etc.), in addition to the number of classrooms available.
- K. Plan with the goal of leaving some room for growth while accounting for known/expected future residential developments.
- L. Avoid creating socio-economic disproportionality in student assignments.
- M. Consider impact of reassignment on transportation efficiency and costs by minimizing the need for busing. Consider existing bus routes as a starting point.
- N. Consider impact of reassignment on programming costs (e.g., moving special education programs, modify curriculum delivery).

Buffer Zones

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.

Brookline, Newton, and Arlington use buffer zones.

Currently, the Lexington School Committee does not have an existing policy on the use of buffer zones.

Fixed District Lines including Specified Buffer Zones

- No impact on students already enrolled in schools
- Allows siblings to attend the same school
- Can be designed to target areas of high density/growth
- Allows for adjustments to maximize space use and better achieve parity across schools in response to population shifts
- May create uncertainty for new families
- Administrative processes are reported to be time consuming
- No certainty that a specific buffer zone will adequately address overcrowding over time
- May impact neighborhood schools

Lexington Schools’ Commitment

- Avoid extremes of over- or under-utilization of school space
- No families will be split – siblings will attend the same elementary school
- Attempt to minimize impact on existing families
- Transportation provided to families in re-assigned areas
- No change to district-wide special education programs

Next Steps

- Ongoing collaboration with the Student Assignment Committee to review feedback
- Student Assignment Committee Meetings:
 - April 7
 - April 12
- Refined recommendations to the School Committee:
April 26 Meeting

Student Assignment Committee Support of Buffer Zones

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 steep 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 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