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LOCAL

Akron Public Schools adjust redistricting plan following public meetings, feedback



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Akron Public School administrators proposed adjustments to their redistricting plan at a third public information meeting Thursday, which drew a notably smaller, but more appreciative, crowd than two previous meetings.

About two dozen parents and members of the community gathered in the East Community Learning Center auditorium as school administrators described their current plan to balance fluctuating populations across the city by shifting some students to different schools.

The redistricting plan is still pending the board of education's review and approval, expected in January. A presentation on the plan is available online at akronschools.com/district/district-information/redistricting.

Under the present version of the plan, Barber CLC in the East cluster of schools would gain elementary school students from Harris-Jackson CLC to alleviate overcrowding, as Harris-Jackson is at around 130% capacity.

The initial version, first proposed last week, would have sent all North cluster students in the Chapel Hill area east of Home Avenue to the East cluster. All students from there who now attend Harris-Jackson and Jennings CLC would have attended Barber CLC and East CLC.

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Superintendent Michael Robinson said that after listening to families at the Dec. 7 presentation at North CLC, where the plan was introduced, administrators decided there was enough capacity to allow older students to remain at Jennings and North CLC.

"So now, we are proposing that they go to Barber in upper elementary, but they can go to Jennings and North for middle school and high school. They don't have to come to East, not

unless they just want to go," Robinson said after the presentation.

He said cluster boundaries proposed in the initial version of the plan may not match the ultimate school assignments, especially regarding the North and East clusters.

Last meeting draws more positive reception

In contrast to crowds of 100 or more at two other recent presentations, the East audience applauded Robinson. While others had numerous questions at the previous meetings, the East meeting only drew a few questions, including one about transportation.

The meeting at East was the final of three scheduled meetings to get public feedback on the plan.

Parent Lillian Brown said later she was uncertain about how the plan would affect her two children.

"There's a lot of different changes coming in," she said. "I just want to see other plans. I'm not sure if I'm sold on this plan. I guess it depends on how it would affect the kids emotionally or socially, so it's something to think about."

Robinson said the board of education should get the final version of the plan around the end of the year.

Transportation a key issue as district balances school populations

Robinson said most of the feedback from families at the presentations has centered on transportation and the availability of services to students, particularly those in the North cluster, which has a high percentage of immigrants who require translators to assist with learning.

The redistricting plan has been in the works for months as the district works to deal with an influx of immigrants in the north side of the city, as well as population decreases and underutilized buildings in other parts of town.

More: As North Hill grows, Akron Public Schools faces tough decisions about overcrowding

Current high school students district-wide would remain at their schools, but some elementary and middle school students would be reassigned to balance out student

populations and improve building utilization.

All families in Akron Public Schools have the option to request their children attend any school in the district, though they may have to provide transportation, and the district has the option to deny requests.

If the plan is approved, families affected by boundary shifts would have to request changes to their children's assignments during a special open enrollment period between Jan. 29 and Feb. 9 next year.

Crowd offers feedback in Firestone Park

Many in the crowd at Firestone Park Monday were particularly upset with the news that their school is slated to be closed.

The Firestone Park closure, along with the closing of Essex Early Learning Center and Stewart Early Learning Center, are part of a facilities plan approved last summer. The early learning center students will be distributed among other elementary buildings.

More: Residents concerned about closure of 'landmark' Firestone Park Elementary in Akron

The Firestone Park students will attend McEbright, Voris or Glover CLCs. David Hill CLC, which is now part of the East cluster, would be shifted to the Garfield cluster.

Robinson said administrators were still discussing the closure of Firestone Park, where many residents were concerned about the building's eventual use.

"That's still in the planning stage, but the building will not be left standing without any activity because we will be utilizing the building until such time that someone wants to do something with it," he said.

Community invited to submit questions

Robinson said administrators continue to discuss the plan, and further changes are possible.

"These meetings have been very beneficial, and we appreciate the community engagement because we were able to hear from our families, our community and things that they value. We were able to hear and listen and take that information back and make appropriate changes," Robinson said.

Those with questions about the redistricting proposal are invited to email redistrictingquestions@apslearns.org.