

SCHOOL BOARD MEMO #21-22-73

DATE: 01/24/2022

TO: Members of the West Fargo School Board

FROM: District Administration

RE: Boundary Adjustment to Mustang Feeder System

FOCUS: Administration is requesting a boundary adjustment to the Mustang feeder system to alleviate overcrowding at Liberty Middle School and Sheyenne High School

The district has experienced growth at the rate of 400-500 learners for the past several years. This fall the district added nearly 650 learners for a record 12,254 total enrollment, moving West Fargo Public Schools (WFPS) to the second largest district in the state of North Dakota behind Bismarck Public Schools. Sheyenne High School (SHS) is currently the largest high school in the state of North Dakota, more than 100 learners larger than West Fargo High School (WFHS), which is the second largest in the state. Our middle schools are also very large, with Liberty Middle School (LMS) being the largest middle school in the state, nearly 150 learners larger than the second largest middle school. Cheney Middle School (CMS) is the fourth largest, but with only 13 fewer learners than Bismarck's Wachter, the state's second largest middle school. This consistent growth has prompted a new school to be built every year for the past ten years. Our most recent buildings include Deer Creek Elementary (Fall 2019), Heritage Middle School (Fall 2020), and Horace High School (Fall 2021). Currently, Brooks Harbor and Horace Elementary Schools are receiving additions to provide more space for our elementary learners. Although the new schools and additions are alleviating overcrowding at some sites, the growth the district experienced this fall has challenged us to find more immediate solutions, and at sites we had not anticipated in the Mustang feeder system.

Last spring, amidst a worldwide pandemic, the district leaders grappled with staffing needs for the 2021-22 school year. The district began the 2020 school year significantly below enrollment projections. Learners were in hybrid model attending school two days a week, and by the end of the year transitioned to five days a week. Many families opted for a virtual learning program or home schooling, creating more uncertainty about enrollment numbers for the fall. The Board took action in June 2021 to move four sections of learners from Freedom, which was over capacity, to Deer Creek, where numbers were lower than anticipated. That alleviated the concern for the immediate future, but in July of 2021, administration brought forward concerns regarding Independence, Freedom, Liberty, and Sheyenne to the Planning and Development Committee (P&D) for discussion. A timeline is provided below:

- **July 19, 2021:** Planning and Development Committee discusses elementary growth and potential feeder system changes due to higher than anticipated growth in Mustang feeder system.

- **August 16, 2021:** Board Workshop - board members and administration discussed elementary growth in Mustang feeder system and reviewed several options including additions to Freedom and Independence, as well as securing land to build a new school.
- **September 20, 2021:** Planning and Development Committee discussed pros and cons to possible solutions to elementary overcrowding at Freedom and Independence. The Board asked the administration to engage YHR Architects and the full board for further discussion.
- **November 15, 2021:** Board workshop - board members and administration discussed the options for overcrowding, including additions to current schools and consideration to build a new school to address overcrowding at Independence and Freedom with YHR architects.
- **November 22, 2021:** School Board approves purchasing of land for and designing of an elementary school in the Rocking Horse Farm development.
- **December 20, 2021:** Planning & Development Committee discussed options for boundary adjustments to accommodate continued growth in the Mustang feeder system.
- **January 6, 2022:** District administration distributed a public video explaining the proposed boundary adjustment.
- **January 11, 2022:** District administration conducted an information and feedback session with Aurora Elementary School families.
- **January 20, 2022:** Horace High School and Heritage Middle School conduct open houses to provide families the opportunity to tour the facilities, meet the staff, ask questions, and connect with other families.
- **January 24, 2022:** Planning & Development Committee brings recommendation for a boundary adjustment to the School Board for a vote.

District administration explored all options. We first needed to identify where there would be room for additional learners. The decision to recommend moving learners to the Hawk feeder system was made because they had space for the learners in the short term, and there is a planned expansion when enrollment indicates the need. Currently, Cheney Middle School is near preferred capacity and West Fargo High School has exceeded preferred capacity. Projections show sustained enrollment for the next five years, so moving Brooks Harbor to the Packer feeder system was not a viable option.

The second question we asked was who would move? The recommendation for moving learners in the Aurora attendance area was based on several considerations:

- The number of learners that needed to be moved out of the Mustang feeder system. The area west of the Sheyenne River is home to approximately 280 learners (about 70 learners X 4 grades) which met our criteria.

- Logical boundaries, such as geographical features or major roads (Sheyenne River and 40th Ave).
- Proximity to current feeder system (Aurora has no boundaries adjacent to SHS or LMS; families would not drive by SHS or LMS to get to HHS or HMS).
- Longevity of boundary (the boundary will last into the foreseeable future).
- Neighborhood schools (Neighborhoods west of the river would be kept together, so children would not be attending a different school than their friends across the street or in the neighborhood).
- Bussing: Aurora has more bus riders than Osgood currently; the vast majority of Osgood students live in the walk zone.

District administration considered moving other schools such as Osgood and the new school in the Rocking Horse development to the Hawk feeder system. They are not our first choice for the following reasons:

- Osgood is very dense with the majority of learners living within 0.9 miles of the school. The vast majority of learners are in the walk zone and their boundary touches Sheyenne. Moving these learners would mean a learner could see a school across the street but they would travel to HMS or HHS.
- Rocking Horse was also not an option because we could not get enough learners to alleviate the overcrowding without having a boundary adjacent to SHS or LMS.
- Both Freedom and Independence have boundaries adjacent to either Sheyenne or Liberty.
- Regardless of how you draw the lines on the map, in order to get enough learners moved out of the Mustang feeder system, you will always have one boarder adjacent to a school in the Mustang feeder system. The only school where this is not the case is Aurora or Brooks Harbor.

Below are the options that have been generated with the pros and cons for each:

Option One: Do nothing

	School/Max Capacity	Fall 21	Fall 22	Fall 23	Fall 24	Fall 25	Fall 26
	Liberty (1200)	1220	1261	1309	1380	1455	1484
	Sheyenne (1550)	1560	1563	1579	1629	1696	1780
Do Nothing							
	Heritage (900)	470	497	537	594	644	704
	Horace High (1050)	230	409	593	659	726	771

Pros	Cons
Boundaries are not affected; all learners stay in Mustang feeder system.	Both SHS and LMS are over capacity affecting class sizes, instruction, relationships, programming, workloads, parking, traffic flow, behaviors, activities, opportunities, etc.
District administration strongly recommends against doing nothing.	

Option Two: Move grades 5, 6, and 7 Aurora learners west of Sheyenne River from the Mustang Feeder System to the Hawk Feeder System.

	School/Max Capacity	Fall 21	Fall 22	Fall 23	Fall 24	Fall 25	Fall 26
	Liberty (1200)	1220	1051	1099	1170	1245	1274
	Sheyenne (1550)	1560	1563	1509	1489	1486	1500
5-7 Move			6-8	6-9	6-10	6-11	6-12
	Heritage (900)	470	707	747	804	854	914
	Horace High (1050)	230	409	663	799	936	1051

Pros	Cons
Eighth graders stay in Mustang feeder system; LMS does not become over capacity until 2025; SHS is under maximum capacity beginning in the fall of 2023	SHS will be over capacity in the fall of 2022; both SHS and LMS will be over preferred capacity affecting class sizes, instruction, relationships, programming, workloads, parking, traffic flow, behaviors, activities, opportunities, etc.; potential concerns with being near capacity including; we will not be prepared for unanticipated growth, and the district will have very limited ability to accept in-district transfer requests, even for family members of current Mustang learners.

Option Three: Move grades 5, 6, 7, and 8 Aurora learners west of Sheyenne River from the Mustang Feeder System to the Hawk Feeder System.

		Fall 21	Fall 22	Fall 23	Fall 24	Fall 25	Fall 26
	Liberty (1200)	1220	1051	1099	1170	1245	1274
	Sheyenne (1550)	1560	1493	1439	1419	1416	1500
5-8 Move			6-9	6-10	6-11	6-12	6-12
	Heritage (900)	470	707	747	804	854	914
	Horace High (1050)	230	479	733	869	1006	1051

Pros	Cons
Provides the most relief from overcrowding for the next 3 years at LMS and next five years at SHS; additional learners provide HHS and HMS more efficient staffing and course delivery	More learners will change feeder systems

Timeline for Next Steps:

January 2022	<p>Received new projections from RSP and Associates.</p> <p>For 2022-2023, overcrowding issues were projected at Freedom, Independence, Liberty and Sheyenne.</p>
Spring 2022	<p>Initiate Long Range Facilities Task Force, completed by Fall 2022. Topics for study include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boundary adjustment planning for elementary learners in Mustang feeder system • Preschool plan • Growth plan for elementary south side • Land acquisition on the north side • Build out of Heritage Middle School and Horace High School • Deferred maintenance • Equitable facilities • Academy retrofits • Bathrooms • South side bus barn • Energy saving projects <p>With current supply chain limitations, it should be assumed any major building project, from design to completion, will take approximately 2.5 years. Should the Long-Range Facilities Task Force decide that a public vote is necessary for any projects with a required completion for the start of the 2025-2026 school year, a referendum would need to be voted on in the spring of 2023. If completion is desired by the fall of 2026, a referendum would need to be voted on in the fall of 2023.</p>

District administration has studied projected enrollment and boundaries for five months and have determined **Option Three** puts the district in the best position to serve our learners with equitable class sizes and opportunities while providing space for additional growth.

Administrative Recommendation: *Approve the boundary adjustment to the Mustang Feeder System as presented in Option Three.*

Sample Motion: *I move to authorize district administration to adjust the boundaries to the Mustang feeder system as presented in Option Three to alleviate overcrowding at Liberty Middle School and Sheyenne High School.*

For more information, please see our website for maps, an informational video, and frequently asked questions: [Maps / Hawk & Mustang Boundary Adjustment \(k12.nd.us\)](https://www.k12.nd.us/maps/hawk-mustang-boundary-adjustment)