

Dearborn Public Schools to hold February meeting on high school overcrowding



By Katie Hetrick For The Press & Guide
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New information and possibly new boundary line options are headed to the Dearborn Public School Board after the district held 10 community meetings to discuss potential changes to the high school attendance areas.

A report with information and opinions gathered at the meetings should be presented to the board in January, said retired administrator Hassane Jaafar, who helped spearhead the community meetings.

Trustees expect to schedule a special meeting for February to again tackle the issue of high school overcrowding, including changing attendance boundary lines.

Superintendent Glenn Maleyko noted the community forums schedule was intensive, and that he attended most of those meetings.

Trustees felt the forums were important to gather input before they move forward with the changes to ease overcrowding at Dearborn and Fordson high schools.

"There really were no decisions made," Maleyko said. "Now the board is going to get some additional options based on the feedback," he added.

Jaafar said administrators are gathering more information about the potential cost for adding a new high school or ninth grade academy, which some parents supported. That work includes meeting with TMP, the district architects.

The analysis could include related costs such as new furniture and additional staff, acquiring land for a new building or bringing an existing building up to snuff for accessibility, asbestos removal, technology connections and fire suppression, Jaafar said.

The report will also summarize input from parents, residents and other community members who attended the meetings, he said. A list of frequently asked questions is also being compiled.

The presentation could also include new proposals from central office based on community suggestions and keeping in mind that the district would like to keep middle schools together and reduce bus travel times, he said.

But Board President Mary Lane later implied her priorities are more family focused.

"I will be looking at less disruption for people," she said of boundary changes.

Administrators are hoping that by March or April, the school board will have provided a clear direction on how to proceed. Dearborn High and Fordson High School are both considered well over capacity, while Edsel Ford has room for more students. Even EFHS would need a significant addition to really ease overcrowding at the other buildings.

Jaafar thanked all those who came and spoke at the community meetings, and applauded those who asked for more information because it showed they were involved and concerned.

Among those asking for more information was Nofila Haidar, who again addressed the board during public comments. Haidar, president of the Dearborn PTA council, has spearheaded a campaign to look at creating a new high school or ninth grade academy. During Monday's school board meeting, she asked for more detailed information about how much residents would pay if they approved a bond to build a new high school.

"I speak on behalf of a number of parents. We would like to see numbers we can work with," Haidar said.

But Lane said any such figures would first require a number of decisions including the size of a new high school and its location.

"When you say you want numbers, and you haven't gotten numbers, I'm a little frustrated," Lane said.

Haidar also again suggested the board consider the closed St. Alphonsus School. Trustees noted the building has no green space and could not provide the same facilities as any of the other high schools.

Later in the meeting, Lane said she was concerned that parents like the idea of another school, but would not like the reality of a new smaller, school with limited facilities, classes and after school activities.

She also spoke against the idea of renting a facility like St. Alphonsus because the district would not get any of its investment costs back.

Trustee Mary Petlichkoff also expressed concern about creating a new school.

"We have an immediate need now. We can't wait five years from now," Petlichkoff said. The district cannot even ask for another bond for at least another year, which would delay the process even more, she said.

That delay also means any cost estimates today would not be accurate by the time the district could proceed, Petlichkoff said.

Administrators previously said smaller additions at Edsel Ford and Dearborn High potentially could be funded without another bond approval from voters.

"We need to have a solution within the coming year to address the overcrowding we are having now," Petlichkoff said.

The district is continuing with plans to add another four classrooms at Dearborn High School, Maleyko said. Trustees would still need to approve those final plans, but the district could start construction next summer.

And administrators are working on plans for how to potentially expand Edsel Ford High School and how to phase that work, Maleyko said.

"The advantage of Edsel is that because of the space, a lot of construction could go on without interrupting instruction," Maleyko said.

Lane said she is going to let the new board president, who will take office in January, schedule the special February board meeting on the high school overcrowding issue.

"It's a lot to weigh," Lane said.