

GREAT FALLS PUBLIC SCHOOLS, MT  
BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENT PROCESS: PUBLIC INPUT 11-7-2017 THROUGH 11/28/2017



We have lived in the Belview area for 11 years. My daughter attended K-6 and just entered middle school this year. My son is in the 3rd grade. One of the main reasons we looked for a house in the Belview area was because of Meadowlark Elementary. My daughter had an awesome elementary experience with staff that really care about the kids and wonderful friends. My son was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes when he was 5 and so entered school with concerns about how to manage his blood sugars effectively and though they had no T1D kids at the time, the staff were amazing and have continued to be understanding and supportive of his needs dealing with highs and lows. The kids in school have also been very supportive and have been curious to learn about T1D and not made him feel different. Since then there have been two other kids that were diagnosed while at Meadowlark and they have, with everyone's permission, connected the families to be a support for each other. This is a long standing relationship that has taken many years to build and simply changing schools for unknown reasons is uncalled for. If we were redistricted to any other school, we would send our son to Our Lady of Lourdes for the remainder of his elementary years. I would feel confident that if he were going to be required to change schools at this point, he would be more successful at a smaller school with smaller classes. We have worked very hard for 4 years to create an environment where we feel confident that his needs are being met and he is safe. We only live 3 minutes from the school and 5 minutes from our employment so we can be at the school quickly if need be.

I read the criteria that the committee is attempting to adhere to for this redistricting and one of them is to get more kids to be able to walk to school. If you move Belview kids to West or any other school you remove that option entirely and there are a number of kids who do walk or ride their bikes to school in nice weather. There are also a large number of parents who drive their kids to school and pick them up. This would also stop and would be having a higher number of kids riding the bus. From our experience with North this year, it is very difficult for Big Sky Bus Lines to accommodate the need for buses as it is. Increasing that demand seems counter-productive. It is also fiscally irresponsible to bus kids farther than they need to be.

Another item on the checklist is using natural boundaries and main streets and railroads. You would be taking kids that cross one, hardly used railroad ( we occasionally hear a train whistle in the middle of the night and I have never in 12 years been held up by a train at that crossing) and taking these kids across a major highway and/or interstate and a river doesn't match your own criteria.

My son also plays baseball with West Side Little League. This is set up by school district. If he were not going to Meadowlark, he would be playing baseball for Riverview Little League as that is where West kids play. This would take a significant amount of income and participants from the West Side Little League without their input. Many of these ball players ride their bikes to the games, which moving their League would remove that option as well.

The ramification does not just affect families that live in the Belview area that have children attending or will be attending school. You need to share this information with property owners as a large selling point to this area is the school children would attend. This could result in reduced property values and a more difficult time selling houses in this area.

Perhaps if I had a child that was only attending school for one year I would not feel as passionately as I do about having to change schools, but we have 11 years invested in this school not only in relationships, but financially with supporting the PTA and fundraising for new school equipment that I felt proud to be involved in and helping the school for my own children as well as those who will be attending for years to come. It is not about, "if you have to bus kids to one school you might as well bus them to another" it is about MUCH more than that. This area is very much like a small community and we have chosen to be apart of that community with Meadowlark included.

I am not sure of the real reasons behind this suggested redistricting, but I do know that displacing 87 students with guidelines you are not following breeds distrust and speculation. My husband and I have to do what is best for our son and we feel that pulling him from public school and sending him to a private school is the best option if he were not to be able to continue with his current, trusted school.

To all it does concern-  
I am disheartened, disappointed and quite disturbed with the way in which the daily lives of the children of our community are being ignore/played with and their families being manipulated and disregarded. It seems the rezoning committee and school district, guided by an outside consulting firm, have become too enthusiastic and far reaching in their endeavor to do what they deem right for the children. A defined issue has grown to impact our entire city and unnecessarily so. The people of Great Falls graciously and generously supported funding to improve the schools and our children's learning environments. The physical replacement of two schools has posed a concern of the division of student populations. With this, other "fixes" have been suggested for things that do not need fixing! It is extremely unfortunate that the growing population in several areas, where new elementary schools are needed, was not addressed by the school district- something that does needs fixing! Proposals and decisions should not be based on the latest trends but on the specific needs of THIS community. There have been too many past instances to prove this correct. It now seems any child may be subject to removal from their current place of education. Moving children from their current school, their friends, their neighborhood, their educational support system, their teacher and school family, their safe place, their comfortable place, for the purpose of raising test scores, improving diversity or simple because there are a few too many kids in the halls, is not responsible nor the right thing to do! It is not a new fact that children need to be and feel all the aforementioned to successfully learn and grow to become involved, educated and contributing members of community. It would seem moving as few students as possible should be the objective -mainly those directly impacted by the new schools. The families greatly impacted by these options chose to live and pay taxes where they feel their children will attend a school which provides their children with the opportunity to succeed. These are not decisions to be made by ANYONE else! The objectives listed are not being met by the proposed boundaries-in many cases, they directly contradict them. It is not safe to unnecessarily bus children up to 5 miles from their homes-crossing major roadways, rivers and railroads. Additional transportation time only makes their day longer - when close, walkable proximity is the desire. Displacing and replacing children does not make any student feel safe, happy, or secure- it makes them feel intimidated, uneasy and scared- none of which is conducive to learning. Nor does it welcome supportive, involved and comfortable parents- as it may very well have the undesirable result of causing anguish, doubt, anger or revenge. Once children begin their educational journey, at their particular school, there is ownership, pride and commitment that should not be broken. Children need to remain in the school in which they began and attend- It is invaluable for their success! I have always believed we have a wonderful school district that tries to do all things in the best interest of kids-it would be a travesty if even one child lost their love of learning because of unnecessary changes in their educational life! Please don't let the decisions being proposed tarnish our district. Thank You

I don't completely agree with boundary change. It will effect permissive transfers and could make to were kids are stuck in not so good of schools. Schools that aren't teaching at their academic level and could cause them to fall instead of continuing to go forward. My daughter has been a permissive transfer for almost 3 years. She excels at her school and is doing extremely well. Kids that are in her same grade but who attend the school in our district aren't at that acidification level as her do to the school not teaching their students. I would hate for my daughter to have to leave a top class school we're she is excelling and has all her friends to be forced to attend a school who would hold her back from learning. I understand there are other benefits to this boundary but there is negative ones to that can affect kids and their learning. I really hope you see and understand where I'm coming from and I appreciate your time. Thank you.

Opposed to redistrict Bellevue elementary students from Meadowlark as we it will decrease the value of home in Bellevue. Meadowlark has a reputation of being one of the best schools in Great Falls and people move to this area in order for their kids to be in the Meadowlark district. By redistricting to West (reputation plus longer commute), it will make the real estate in Bellevue less appealing and decrease the value of our homes. In addition, we value the proximity of Meadowlark to our homes, redistricting us to West poses expense, difficulty and danger (children going across the water and literally passing Meadowlark in the commute to West).

I absolutely am against this boundary adjustment that would send my daughters to Longfellow. I bought my house specifically in the Sunnyside school district. The environments those poor kids come from at Longfellow is not their fault. I understand the teachers are trying their best, but my children do not need to be exposed to some of the situations that happen in or around Longfellow. Just the other day they arrested 2 meth dealers a block away from that school. I mentioned at the beginning I bought my house with my children's education and well-being in mind, as I'm sure others in my neighborhood have. I hope the school board takes that into consideration before making such a drastic decision.

I am very much opposed to moving students from Meadowlark Elementary to West Elementary or other location. Currently, many of the students can walk to school. For others, it is a short trip on mostly residential streets. Meadowlark is the classic case of a "neighborhood school". It provides a good education to our kids in a safe and healthy environment near their homes. Meadowlark currently has 507 students in a school recommended for 500. That is not significant overcrowding. We must concentrate on our kid's education well before demographics, building useage or any other lesser considerations.

When reading through the "criteria/guidelines" for redistricting, I still can't understand why my kids, who can bike/walk to school now, have to take the bus. We (Belview families) are literally driving by Meadow Lark to take our kids to a different school 8 miles from our home vs Meadowlark which is 3 miles. And then there's 10th ave which our kids are now expected to cross. I would think this is considered a major roadway-and let's be honest, the worst road/Ave in Great Falls where the most accidents happen! Why are we making kids cross 10th if they don't have to? I cannot stress enough how moving Belview to West elementary does not make any sense nor does it follow barely any criteria for redistricting.

GREAT FALLS PUBLIC SCHOOLS, MT  
BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENT PROCESS: PUBLIC INPUT 11-7-2017 THROUGH 11/28/2017



First of all, thank you to all who are working on the redistricting plan. It must seem to be a thankless job because you won't be able to please everyone and some very difficult decisions will need to be made.

I would like to encourage you to more carefully consider a couple of points when creating the boundaries.

- 1) Keep children in existing schools when possible. Because school assignment affects placement for soccer, basketball, Boy Scouts and many other activities outside of school, a change in schools could potentially disrupt a kid's entire world. Currently, of all my child's team affiliations, only baseball would likely remain unchanged. This is a lot of change for these little ones. In addition, for juniors and seniors in high school, the established relationships with faculty and staff are so important for Letters of Recommendation and scholarship applications.
- 2) Geographic proximity. We are in the Belview neighborhood - chosen intentionally when we relocated here 6 years for work. At that time, we did not have school-age children, but we liked that the kids would be able to ride bikes to school. In the proposed boundaries, the assigned school is much farther away, over the river and across some very busy roads and riding bikes would not be an option. I like to walk to school to pick up my kids when I can and though much of the year this is not possible, it is exceptionally nice when weather permits.

Please keep in mind that a change in Elementary school is for 7 years, more than half the time that the child will be educated in the GFPS system. Many parents carefully research and select the Elementary school district they reside in for this very reason.

I know personal situations cannot be considered, but I think adhering to the above is in the best interests of all students in Great Falls. As noted before, we intentionally selected a neighborhood assigned to Meadow Lark because we value the school rating and have family very near Meadow Lark that care for our children on days I work late. I'm disappointed that the careful planning and decisions we made to engineer the life we wanted may not come to fruition.

Thank you for your consideration and time. I wish you the best of luck in your endeavors.

I am a resident of Bellvue Hts and I am not agreeable with rezoning ours kids, the whole reason we bought in this area was so our kids can continue going there. Plus this will definetly impact our resale value in the neighborhood, we already pay enough in taxes to also get hit with decrease value

With regard to permissive transfers... We would like to see permissive transfers continue for siblings of special needs children who are unable to attend their home school. Many of the MSDB students mainstream into Lewis and Clark/East/GFHS, including our hard of hearing kindergartner. Moving our hearing 2nd grader to Lewis and Clark from Meadowlark this year was a very positive change. It's improved our kids' relationship with each other and it certainly makes logistics easier on us as parents. It also eliminated the need for bussing for both children, as we drive them to and from school now. We would like to be able to continue sending our hearing daughter to Lewis and Clark (and eventually East and GFHS) in the future if possible. Thank you, Whitney Olson and Doug Little, parents of Aliona and Lucia Little

Esteemed board members,

My neighbors and I are strongly opposed to this measure regarding the move of Belview Palisades students to West elementary. I moved to Great Falls in 2016 and specifically chose my house based on the children's attendance at Meadowlark. As an Air National Guard member in Alaska over 16 years my kids have had to deal with my deploying for an aggregate of years due to operations in the Middle East. This has brought a level of instability that I can't prevent given my choice of profession. I moved to Great Falls in order to be closer to extended family and raise my kids in a great small town to help mitigate my involuntary leaves of absence. My kids are the most important thing in my life. That importance directly affected where we moved when we arrived. Hence the selection of the Belview area, as Meadowlark is so well regarded. I couldn't be happier with my decision over the last year as I truly enjoy Great Falls and Meadowlark. However this redistricting is a punch in the gut. The move was not easy for my son and two daughters. They have never moved before and had to say tearful goodbyes to many friends they had known there entire life. Luckily they have made fast friends at Meadowlark elementary and we have had great engagement with the teachers. Moving them again I fear would rip a bandage off a healing wound, increasing the unpredictability they have already suffered given my work and our recent move. Please do not rip this bandage. Please do not redistrict the Belview area.

Additionally, my children sometimes ride their bikes to school as we all did when we were kids. This commute on bike would be very hazardous given distance and the amount of traffic they must navigate if they had to move to West. This portion of the decision goes directly against many goals stated in the guiding principles and criteria stated on your website which I hope are given more weight in a reconsideration of the Belview area redistricting.

Anecdotally, a house has come up for sale this week on my street. A coworker was considering buying this. I disclosed this current potential of redistricting. She said that would definitely prevent her from buying this house if Belview was redistricted. I am disappointed that my coworkers do not want to join my community based on this situation.

I urge you to reconsider this action. I will be available for additional justification at any time day or night. Please email, call or Facebook messenger me at any time.

Thank you for your consideration.

Very respectfully,  
Major Brian Nosich  
Montana Air National Guard  
Chief of Wing Intelligence

Hello, my name is Ryan Winkler, I am a parent of a current 4th grader at Meadowlark Elementary. She has attended Meadowlark since beginning her public education and this is my third child to attend the school, as her two older brothers also completed their Elementary education there. I would like to express my sincere disagreement with the committees potential plan to redistrict my neighbor hood and force the current children of Belview Palisades to change the Grade School with which they happily attend. I sympathize with the challenges that public schools face on a regular basis concerning boundaries, student populations, socioeconomic blending and the financial objectives of the district, but would urge this committee to reconsider this potential move. In addition to the increased cost for the district to bus students to the new location, and the obvious challenges that the students themselves will face, please consider these additional arguments. Meadowlark is a highly regarded school in this district, parents have worked hard to afford a residence that falls within its boundaries and most have made conscious decisions and sacrifices that ensure their children can attend this high performing school. For the committee to disregard the desires of these high tax paying families, the sacrifices they have and continue to make, and the emotional toll it will undoubtedly take on the children is inconceivable. In addition, the obvious affect it will have on property values must be taken into consideration. Challenges to the students, increased cost to the district, the negative affect on property values and the overall anger and resentment of these affected families cannot be ignored. Please reconsider this measure and work to find other means with which to reach the committees desired goals.

Not in favor of transporting elementary students from Belview Palisades to West Elementary. Please keep them at Meadowlark where they have been since the subdivision was established....

As a current Middle School Counselor and former Middle School Teacher for 23 years, I believe demographics of the school population is a critical consideration for this committee. Information on free & reduced lunch, group homes and students considered homeless should be considered. When Great Falls Public Schools had three middle schools, the populations were evenly dispersed between the schools. This created an effective learning environment for all, including those groups mentioned above. We know poverty impacts our students and when the numbers are out of balance it impacts all students in a school. It also impacts teachers, administrators and those who provide necessary support; for instance counselors, school psychologists, SRO's and support staff. In my opinion, this is a great opportunity to address some of these issues.

As a traveling elementary teacher, I see the need to rebalance some of our schools. My daughter is on a permissive transfer, however, and I am very apprehensive about the possibility that her school will change when she is so successful at her current school. Is there a way to "grandfather in" current permissive transfer students for the benefit of those students without affecting the overall process?

I would encourage the department to find ways to keep the children from Belview Palisades at Meadowlark Elementary School. A longer bus ride would not be productive for elementary children. In addition, parent involvement and after school activities could suffer.

GREAT FALLS PUBLIC SCHOOLS, MT  
BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENT PROCESS: PUBLIC INPUT 11-7-2017 THROUGH 11/28/2017



We purchased a home in the downtown area with a school boundary placing us at Lincoln, many of the students (lower socioeconomic) within this pocket have excelled because of their ability to attend a higher AYP school like Lincoln (unlike Whittier) these students have benefitted by being transported and integrated into Lincoln.

I was so proud of the district for having this pocket of socioeconomic diversity redistricted for the past few years. I consider this very progressive for Montana. Now many of these children are going to be moved to a school that can't meet AYP for many years and will see an influx of more students. Does that make any sense? What resources does the district plan to give to Whittier to accommodate a higher enrollment of socioeconomic diversity? Why has Whittier continued to perform so poorly and yet you want to move more kids there? What does this do for our city to continue to create these pockets of poverty? I am so sad that I promoted, fought for and encouraged the passing of the bond and now feel blindsided by this quick move by the district to change boundaries! If it's about overcrowding then why give so many permissives to Lincoln then say it's overcrowded? We bought our residence because of the school. We want to revitalize downtown but it's almost impossible with no school integration and pockets of poverty attending a couple schools. We currently support Lincoln with additional personal funds and encourage business support for our public schools but if we are redistricted to a school with such poor performance such as Whittier we will be forced to take that financial support for the public schools and use it to pay for private education.

The one thing I'm grateful for is this has opened my eyes and I now realize the disparities of our schools to a greater extent. What are the AYP scores for Whittier the OPI webpage says there's an error and I'm unable to find the scores? Another link to the <https://www.schooligger.com/go/MT/schoolrank.aspx> says Whittier is one of the worst performing schools in the state and has been declining for the past 10 years? Is this true? I'm beyond disappointed by this.. How does a school remain open with these scores if they're correct? And now you want to put more students there? How is this safe? Safe for our community? Our tax dollars are doing what? And now I will possibly be forced to put my child in this school and continue to have to pay taxes to support this, even if I put my child in private school? I can now see the reason or benefit of Charter schools, it gives parents options.

Please don't redistrict the pocket of students from downtown that attend Lincoln and have benefitted immensely by socioeconomic integration!! This helps our downtown immensely and improves our city more than you'll ever know.. I see it every time my child rides the bus and we wait at the bus stop, these kids are benefitting!

If you insist on redistricting consider parallel horizontal borders of integration of the North side with one line going to Whittier and the other to Giant Spings with both reaching far to the east and west!

I would like to pose several related questions to the committee. Since the timeline for implementation is proposed to begin in Fall 2018, what is the plan for students who currently attend one school but will be asked to move schools because of boundary reajstment? Are there plans to allow those who are in 6th, 8th or 12th grade to be allowed to finish at the school where they began? In particular, students who live on MAFB and who are seniors at CMR seem to deserve consideration. Will there be changes to permissive transfer system at the high school level? How should parents seek this information? Thank you for taking time to discuss these complex issues.

I spent some time looking at the various options made available on the Redistricting website, and I would like to submit an additional option for the committee's consideration. I wish I could comment on more than just Meadow Lark's boundaries, but I am not as familiar with those areas and so I restrict my comments to what I know and the data that I have reviewed.

One of the challenges facing Meadow Lark is that the school is at capacity and the population within the geographic area in which the current Meadow Lark students live is growing, so there is a need to move some current students from Meadow Lark to another GFPS elementary school. In the majority of these options on the website, the Belview neighborhood (West of Flood Road and the train tracks) is shown to attend West Elementary. I would like to present an alternative.

I think moving these children from a local, neighborhood school is not in the best interest of the community. Extracurricular activities for older elementary school students take place before and after school and outside of the times the busses run. Currently Belview students who wish to participate in these activities are able to ride their bikes or walk to school. If these students were moved to a different school, the walk or ride option is eliminated. For students whose parents work and are unable to drive children to/from school at those times, that leaves them with the options of attending HANDS (which is not designed for the older elementary students), having students on school grounds 'illegally' at times which they are not permitted to be unsupervised or not participating in the enhancement opportunities.

Older elementary students currently are able to walk/ride to many of their classmates' homes which fosters community and independence. To move these students to a school further away would disrupt that growth as well.

Based on the importance of attending a true neighborhood school, I would propose that the areas S of 45th Ave SW on both Flood Rd and Fox Farm Road would be districted for an elementary school other than Meadow Lark. While perhaps not a large number of students in comparison to Belview, this area is the fastest growing section of Meadow Lark's current boundaries which would aid in the school's population being at capacity. Geographically, these houses are not close enough or safe enough to ride bikes or walk to school or friends' houses. In addition, busses do not currently run to all areas both before and after school. These students would still attend school with their closest neighbors fostering community in their small pockets.

I appreciate the committee's consideration.

After reviewing the options that have been provided, I still think there is some work to do. I would like to see Giant Springs servicing the students on the other side of 8th avenue north. It is contradictory to the goals by having these kids going to Morningside which is farther away and along 8th avenue instead of having them cross the street to go to GSE. I do not think that having kids go from Black Eagle to Morningside makes any sense at all. Black eagle children should go to Sacajawea. I am not buying into the diversity bit of the goals. That is only prevalent in the Elementary School changes. I do like that Malmstrom MS and HS goes to GFH. That makes more geographical sense. I would love to be apart of the conversation whenever the public is aloud as I was with the facility upgrade conversations and provide input.

Thank you for looking at the current school boundaries. When hearing comments, I want to urge everyone to resist a narrative around home prices. I believe this to be coded racism. With the historical context of good neighborhoods, with high house prices, meaning low crime and neighborhood efforts meant to keep out racial minorities, good schools and good neighborhoods has an inherent racial background. When considering the best boundaries for schools, stick to the data found in your GIS study, not the opinions of ill-informed citizens.

The last paragraph was quite incoherent, but I am trying this on my break and wanted to do so before I forgot.

Garrett Lankford

Dear Committee. I am not able to attend the meeting tonight 11/28 to listen to what is thought and said, however here are my thoughts on the boundaries referring to moving the Bellview homes out of Meadow Lark district. After last meeting I only options 1,2,3,4 were available. I see now that options 5 and 6 are on the website and asking as far as Meadow Lark is concerned to please lean towards them. The reason for the boundary moves are concerning the new Giant Springs Elementary and it is logical to make use of those areas and the changes on that side of town. The buildings on the West side of Great Falls have not been expanded, the changes regarding Meadow Lark seem counter productive with all the goals set by the analysis company. In the first table shown the schools labeled as "above high capacity" are Lincoln, Meadow Lark, Riverview, and Sacajawea. When moving to Great Falls over ten years ago, those were the schools I heard you wanted your children to attend. I believe that will continue to be true and changing the lines will not change the fact people will continue to move into these boundary lines to attend the schools. Moving the Bellview children from Meadow Lark would create that neighborhood as less desirable to families moving in the area due to the distance that West Elementary is from the location. This would have been true to me when purchasing a home over ten years ago. I can only imagine what it would do to house value, which is only a concern to the fact the line change would have us consider moving to continue to be in the boundary lines of Meadow Lark. This year my youngest child is in kindergarten at Meadow Lark. We chose this home truly because of the proximity to Meadow Lark, which is slightly over a mile and not crossing 10th Ave South. I know my family would is not the only ones considering this or the other option I have heard is private schools. Which I can relate to. If we are suddenly busing and commuting miles across town then why not another direction towards a private school? I am sure this is not what the Committee wanted when trying to make the school capacity use more productive. I did also notice the change in the graph from the table given out Oct. 10 from 82 students that would move from Meadow Lark to West, to the table now as 71. If you are considering either number it is a large number of students to move. A table of Total K-6th Live and Attend in Impacted has an estimated number of 400 to 301 impacted. The last number does not include the change of Bellview out of Meadow Lark boundary. This is a huge change! When looking at GFPS redistricting guiding principles/criteria, "Minimize the number of student moves, while considering redistricting goals" is definitely not being met here. When looking at the table Enrollment/Live-In Statistics: Continued (page 2) There is always a school with "Above the High Capacity", it is more of choosing which one it is. It is also interesting that Meadow Lark changes to "Within Low and High Capacity" from 507 to 492. I would again like to point out the previous change in from the table released in October to the table released now in November that it was an eleven student difference. Which is also very close of the amount that would have Meadow Lark in the ideal range. So why are we moving 71 students to make a 15 student difference? Why have them suddenly be out of range to walk to school or bike to school. They do walk and/or bike or have after school activities (which are usually divided up to school attend) in an area close to their home. Why have change a 5 to 7 minute commute to over 15 minutes and crossing large amounts of traffic? Why change an area where there is little room for development and within the city limits but not areas that are miles away from Meadow Lark, out of city limits, and already commute? When considering the GFPS Redistricting Guiding Principles/Criteria, please really look at the impact changing this Bellview neighborhood geographically close to Meadow Lark and isolated from the other choices of elementary schools. Thank you for your time.