

# *New Haven Unified School District*

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING SCHOOL CLOSURE**

### **FOR PARENTS**

#### **1. Why are we closing schools?**

Most of the eight elementary schools in the New Haven Unified School District were built to serve at least 900 students, and the District's three middle schools were built to serve up to 1,500 students each.

But school enrollment is declining, not only in New Haven but in 16 of the 17 other districts in Alameda County, as families with school-age children continue to leave the Bay Area in search of affordable housing. In New Haven, through the first three weeks of the 2006-2007 school year, average enrollment was about 710 students for elementary schools and 1,020 students for middle schools. And as enrollment continues to decline, student populations at each school will get even smaller.

New Haven's enrollment has dropped from 13,797 students in 1997-98 to 12,867 students in 2005-06, including a drop of 208 students from 2004-05 to 2005-06. Through the end of the third week of the 2006-2007 school year, enrollment had dropped an additional 210 students over the 2005-2006 enrollment. A loss of 200 students means a loss of \$1,080,000 in state revenue. A commensurate reduction in teachers saves about \$480,000, but that still leaves a \$600,000 shortfall.

The Board of Education, determined to ensure that the maximum amount of money is spent on teaching and learning, voted in May to accept a recommendation from the Superintendent that the District reduce spending on facilities and operations by closing one elementary school in 2007 and one middle school in 2008. The Board voted in September to accept the Superintendent's recommendation that Cabello Elementary and Barnard-White Middle be the schools closed.

The closures will equate to ongoing cost reductions of approximately \$1 million per year, money that can be spent on teaching and learning.

#### **2. Why are we more concerned with the budget than with our children?**

We aren't. In fact, it's just the opposite. Closing schools is just one of several changes we are making to reduce spending on facilities and operations and ensure that the maximum amount of money is being spent on teaching and learning. It's the same reason we have established staffing ratios for site administration and clerical staffs, and the same reason we are making changes in transportation.

Nearly half of the students in our district are not proficient in English/ language arts and/or mathematics. In other words, the system is failing nearly half of our children - and if we keep doing things the way we've been doing them, we will keep getting the same unsatisfactory results.

To reach 85 percent proficiency by 2010 - one of the objectives in the Strategic Plan designed in 2005-06 by students, parents, teachers, classified employees, principals,

administrators and community members - we must redirect more resources to teaching and learning. Already, we have committed more than \$500,000 to teaching and learning initiatives such as offering additional training for all classroom teachers, hiring teacher specialists to assist classroom teachers in targeted subject areas and reintroducing curriculum leaders. We are now able to provide additional assistance in language arts and math for economically disadvantaged students, more resources for English Language Learners, and greater challenges for our highest achieving (GATE) students.

### **3. What's happens now that the schools to close have been named?**

When a school is closed, students worry about going to a new school, perhaps in a different neighborhood, with children and teachers they don't know. They worry about missing their old friends and having to make new ones. If they've always walked to school, they worry about taking a bus; even if they've taken a bus, they worry about what might be a longer ride. They worry, especially in middle school, about loss of "reputation," personally, socially, athletically, politically and in other ways. They worry about losing opportunities for leadership on athletic teams, in student government and in other co-curricular and extra-curricular programs.

The District and the Board of Education are committed to being sensitive to those concerns and doing everything possible to alleviate them.

Once the boundaries are determined in November, parents, students and teachers from both Cabello Elementary School and Barnard White Middle School will be provided opportunities to visit their new schools. Working with the various schools staffs opportunities for interschool projects and social and athletic activities will be encouraged. Transferring students will be given an opportunity to take a field trip to their new school, meet other students and see their new campus and classrooms.

Students at the receiving school will be taking part in discussions about the importance of welcoming their new classmates. Transferring students will be given a map of their new school, listings of student rules and schedules and information about special activities. Any team tryouts, class elections, etc., normally held in the spring will be delayed until the fall, to ensure that transferring students have a chance to participate.

### **4. My school will be closing, which school will my child attend?**

Most if not all students at the schools being closed will be assigned to the school next-nearest to their home as a result of the new attendance boundaries. Now that the Board has approved that Cabello Elementary School will close in 2007-2008 and Barnard White Middle School will close in 2008-2009, the District will immediately begin the process to redraw attendance boundaries. The District will create two or three possible boundaries plans. Each plan, though unique based upon various criteria, will create equal enrollments for the schools.

As was true for receiving input from the community for which schools to close, the district administrative staff will hold community meetings to discuss the pros and cons on various boundary plans.

Following these community forums on school boundaries, the Superintendent will make a recommendation on school boundaries to the Board in November.

**5. What if I wish to have my child attend another elementary or middle school?**

Parents will continue to be able to take advantage of the intra-district transfer policy if they wish to have their child attend a school in the district other than their home school. These transfers are based upon available space at the various grades at our schools.

**6. Does my “new” school have the same programs?**

Each of our schools will be able to provide the same range of programs needed for the students.

**7. Don't larger schools cost more to run?**

Regardless of size, a school needs at least one administrator, sufficient clerical and custodial staff and food service workers. Regardless of size, a school needs utilities, such as electricity, heat and water, and regular maintenance and repair. By closing schools and putting more students in each building, fixed costs can be saved.

**8. Aren't smaller schools better for learning?**

Research shows that small learning communities, not necessarily small schools, help improve student achievement - and creating smaller learning communities, regardless of the size of the school, remains a District priority. School staffing is based on enrollment, so regardless of the size of the school; the ratio of students to teachers remains the same. In addition, schools with larger enrollments are more likely to have additional support staff, such as assistant principals and clerical personnel.

**9. Who will take care of my child's special needs?**

As the teachers and other support staff needed will follow the students to the newly assigned school, you can expect that your child's special needs, whether it be Special Education needs, English Language Learner needs, Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) needs or others will also be available at the new school.

**10. Will the district provide transportation, if my child's school is too far to walk?**

Transportation concerns will be an important consideration as we begin the process of determining new attendance boundaries, and we will be particularly sensitive to the needs of those for whom transportation costs might constitute a financial hardship.

The District will continue to pay much of the cost of providing transportation for qualifying students, but families of children eligible for transportation will need to purchase a bus pass. For the 2007-08 school year (when the elementary closure will occur), the cost of an annual round-trip pass will be \$375, and the cost of a one-way (morning or afternoon) pass will be \$215. For students whose families qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, the cost will be \$215 for an annual round-trip pass and \$120 for a one-way pass.

We will consider adopting a reduced rate, and we also are exploring the possibility of “grandfathering in” current Emanuele and Hillview Crest students who would be going to Barnard-White and offering them a reduced rate for service to whichever middle school will be serving their attendance area.

**11. If my child walks to school will he or she have to cross busy intersections, railroad tracks?**

Consistent with our Board policy and our practice, the location of busy intersections, railroad tracks and other potential safety issues will be considered in determining eligibility for bus transportation.

**12. Will there be crossing guards?**

We will work with the City of Union City if new locations are needed for the crossing guard program.

**13. When boundaries are changed, will students at non-closing schools be affected?**

The District will make every effort to transfer as few children as possible who currently are attending non-closing schools; invariably, however, some transfers will be necessary. Transfers will be kept to an absolute minimum, and individual situations will be taken into account whenever possible.

The District will continue to provide transportation to any student who lives more than three-quarters of a mile from their elementary school or a mile-and-three-quarters from their middle school.

**14. What's going to happen to the schools that are closed?**

The District is considering several possibilities for using the facilities that are closed, including but not limited to: a District-wide pre-school; a District-wide full-day kindergarten program; a District-wide immersion school where instruction would be in both English and either Spanish, Mandarin or Punjabi; a community day school; a specialized learning center for struggling eighth-grade students, who could receive concentrated learning before moving on to high school; a temporary facility for schools that are being modernized; etc.

The alternative uses, such as those listed above, do have a cost, but most of the possibilities also bring with them potential revenue, as well as the prospect of increasing enrollment. Therefore, the cost of such programs would be considerably less than the savings expected from the closing of schools.

The District will NOT sell the schools that are closed. Most districts that have done so in the past have found that the short-term economic benefits are far outweighed by the long-term loss of established facilities.

# **FOR STUDENTS**

## **1. Will my friends also be moved to my new school?**

Now that it has been decided to close Cabello Elementary School at the end of this school year and Barnard White Middle School at the end of next school year, we will now begin the process to draw new attendance boundaries for the schools. Which school you will attend will be determined by the new boundaries. Generally speaking, students who live in the same neighborhoods will most likely attend the same school. Our goal is to draw new boundaries so that all the schools are about the same size. We know that this change will not be easy for everyone and we will work hard with the principals, teachers and other staff members to make your assignment to a new school a positive experience.

## **2. Will I have to walk farther?**

It is possible that you could have to walk farther to your new school, but if you live more than three-quarters of a mile from your new elementary school or more than a mile-and-three-quarters from your middle school you will be eligible for bus transportation.

## **3. Are my teachers going to the new school?**

Teachers from the schools that are closing will be able to transfer to the new assignments that are created at the remaining schools. The teachers do have some choice in picking their new assignment. We are confident that teachers will not lose their jobs as a result of school closure. Though there will be fewer schools, there will be nearly the same number of teachers. The main reason schools are closing is that over time we have continued to grow smaller in size. Our schools were built to have large enrollments so as we continue to shrink; closing schools will enable us to use the money that is saved to help improve students' learning.

## **4. Will my new school also have the same after-school activities?**

You can expect that the same type of after-school or co-curricular activities will be available at your new school. Students and teachers from your new school will visit with you to answer your questions and help plan for the following year. You will be given an opportunity to take a field trip to your new school, meet other students and see your new campus and classrooms.

There will be a variety of activities to help you feel welcomed at your new school. You'll get a map of the new school, listings of student rules and schedules and information about special activities. Any team tryouts, class elections, etc., normally held in the spring will be delayed until the fall, to ensure that you have an opportunity to participate.