There is a better plan for Eden Prairie

By Allyson Kaiser

Several weeks ago, I was part of a planning team with our concerns of the proposed K-6 Transition and proposed boundary changes. While differences of opinion are to be expected when changes of this magnitude are considered, my concerns with moving to K-6 were that it doesn’t equally distribute enrollment amongst available space. It requires unnecessary building alterations, increases the district’s operating costs, and is disruptive to students.

The plan is centered on incompatibility of the objectives of balancing diversity while at the same time making student cohorts smaller and increasing enrollment at the least diverse school. It is much more convoluted than it needs to be to solve our problems and support student achievement.

The issues before us are simple. Our facilities are large in design resulting in operating efficiencies when they are at capacity. Due to a shift in demographics, our secondary schools, Cedar Ridge and Eden Lake, are overcrowded and new K-6 northern schools, Prairie View and Fusion, are not utilized. Additionally, Oak Point is designed to house the enrollment peak and now has additional space. Eagle Heights was opened in its sixth year, is being housed in inadequate facilities, and has a split campus which transitions at fourth grade, which is inconsistent with the rest of the district.

In addition, the administration desires to better balance demographics amongst our schools and meet the demands for full day kindergarten, preschool and Spanish Immersion. The current plan under consideration changes all schools to K-6, moves Eagle Heights to Oak Point and adds another elementary school.

In addition, over 1,100 children will be moved to balance demographics. No exceptions will be made for any student including the 12 percent of our student population who are individuals with different educational plans. It will take several years for Oak Point to reach full capacity, meanwhile the four remaining elementary schools will be bursting at the seams.

A better plan has been proposed to the board and administration that could achieve enrollment and demographic balance immediately, reduce operating costs and curtail Oak Point programs by housing Spanish Immersion K-6 school in the Forest Hills building. The remaining three neighborhood elementary schools would become K-3 schools and would function in grades four to six. If student transitions are a concern, the fourth grade would “loop” to Oak Point with their third graders and a group of students.

The benefits of this plan are many:

- The building will all be utilized for the grades that they were designed for eliminating the need for capital improvements.
- Moving the students from Forest Hills into the rest of the district would allow for a more normal balance of diversity and the result of a larger student draw Schools would be the same size diversity by fourth grade.
- Oak Point building will continue to provide the economies of scale at full capacity.
- Eagle Heights would be able to achieve a true immersion environment.
- Only two grades at Forest Hills would be moved to new schools – a fraction of the student body affected under the proposed boundary plans.
- The capacity of Forest Hills can meet the historical demand of the student bodies who desire Spanish Immersion.
- It eliminates the operating cost of one school instead of adding another.

Forest Hills neighborhood will not be disrupted and programs that are successfully supporting these student achievement would need to be reevaluated in the remaining elementary schools, however, the proposed boundary map would spread them amongst each other.

While change is necessary and will inevitably disrupt some, I do not believe it will not negatively impact someone, minimizing disruption to students, unifying the community and operating as efficiently as possible should be a major consideration of the board and administration. There has been tension in the community surrounding our schools and resources for six years. Eden Prairie is a community of its resources and civility. The plan on the table will only increase the divide and take more dollars out of the classrooms.

Over 1,200 Eden Prairie residents have signed a petition asking for a better plan. It will be presented at the School Board meeting on Dec. 21. It is time to put aside differences and self-interest for the sake of the children in our community. If you want a better plan, please sign the petition at http://www.ipetterson.com/petition/ epwapeel2ofcppetition and present it to the School Board and administration. There is a chance that some residents' needs can't be met and we can unify our community forward in a way that is reasonable, fiscally responsible and makes our community prosperous.

Allyson Kaiser is an Eden Prairie parent and former member of the school district’s Five-Year Facilities Task Force.

Polly A. Conway

Conway, 55, of Eden Prairie, died Friday, Dec. 3, 2010. She was an employee of The Colony in Eden Prairie.

Funeral services were Tuesday, Dec. 7 at 7 p.m. with visitation one hour prior to the service at Washburn-McReary Edina Chapel, 952-920-3996.

Dale Dana Shepard


Memorial service was Saturday, Dec. 11, 2010 at 11 a.m. with visitation one hour prior at Prairie Lutheran Church, Eden Prairie.

Memorial services are being handled by Washburn-McReary Eden Prairie Chapel, 952-975-0400.

Patricia Ann Uram


Memorial service was held Sunday, Dec. 12 at 12 p.m. with visitation one hour prior to service at Washburn-McReary Eden Prairie Chapel, 952-975-0400.