

**MINUTES OF THE ELEMENTARY ENROLLMENT / ATTENDANCE
AREAS COMMITTEE
December 16, 2024**



Call to Order: 5:02 p.m.

Committee Members Present:

Jake Dixon – Zone 1 Parent	Holli Haws – Zone 2 Parent (absent)
Eryn Kelsey – Zone 3 Parent	Jennifer Warner – Zone 3 Parent
Lauren Dalton – Zone 3 Parent	Emily Astin – Zone 4 Parent
Jennifer Lloyd – Zone 5 Parent	Tara Dayley – Teacher
Cody Perry – Teacher	Nick Muckerman – Administrator
Angela Stevens – Administrator	Troy Johnson – Administrator
AJ Watson – Director	Jackie Reader – ArcGIS Specialist

Committee Purpose

- Address Decline in District-Wide Enrollment
- Maximize Use of District Resources
- Develop Recommendations/Options to Provide to School Board for Elementary Enrollment Areas

Mr. Watson welcomed the committee and went through the agenda and reminded the committee we would not meeting again until January 5th. He stated we will not be giving any recommendations to the Board on Tuesday night because of the timeline. He said he wanted to be able to present things to this committee and also get feedback before taking thing recommendations to the Board. He said there will be a special board meeting in January and we will discuss that later in the meeting.

Committee Goals

- *Optimizing Capacity-* balance populations make best use of available space
- *Equitable Access-* fair access to educational programs and facilities
- *Minimize Disruptions-* for learners and families
- *Maintain Efficiency-* travel time and middle school feeders
- *Future Needs and Considerations-* planning for future changes and needs

Washington Neighborhood Association Presentation

Mr. Watson stated that the Washington Advocate Group was here to present to the committee. Mr. Ryan Cameron and Mr. Dakota Bates introduced themselves and said they were members of the Washington Elementary Advocates and that they formed this group over the last three weeks. Mr. Cameron said they appreciated the challenge of what was in front of this committee. He said he just wants to be part of the process and share some ideas. He said some of the data they are looking at through a different perspective and they want to be creative and collaborative. Mr. Cameron said they formed this group after they read the initial proposed memo from this group that went to the Board. He said the Washington Advocates Group consists of parents of Washington Elementary, people from the college, and concerned neighborhoods. He said they believe the school is the fabric of the neighborhood and they have residence that do no have kids going to that school but still do not want to see it closed. He said they have invited subject matter advisors into the group because they want this to be positive and data driven. He asked architects and historic preservationists to be a part of the group as well along with people from city planning. He said several of them had been part of the civic activism of the historic neighborhoods. He said they have six mission statements that they would like to shar:

- 1. Closing a school has widespread consequences. Don't rush*
- 2. The city wants core neighborhood investment.*
- 3. A walkable school is essential to a complete neighborhood.*
- 4. Community stakeholders need to be involved in creating enrollment.*

5. A closure does not address the root causes of declining enrollment.
6. Like PHS, Washington is unique and valuable because of its history.

He said they are going to ask the Board to not rush this decision. He said the city wants core neighborhood schools. He said he feels like community stakeholders need to be involved to help solve the problem at hand (ISU, the city, neighborhood association). He said one of their biggest concerns is not addressing the root causes of the declining enrollment. He said they want to help with creative options for addressing this with the fiscal challenges that come with it. He said they feel Washington Elementary is unique and valuable because it is 105 years old. He feels there are options available to help off-set costs. He said they had 300 people show up on Saturday morning to do their march. He said one group had 4 generations that had attended Washington Elementary. He said briefly on the Pocatello's Comprehensive Plan, the City is following a method called Smart Growth. He said we have core neighborhoods and they are developing a comprehensive plan in conjunction with that and renovation is often cheaper than newer construction. He said walkable neighborhoods are part of the City's plan and that is partly why they choose to live in that neighborhood. He said one of the biggest concerns in the proposed boundary changes is that it is very disruptive and he doesn't want to minimize the challenge in front of the committee but it shifts a lot of learners north. He said there is a big gapping whole in the middle of the City with Washington Elementary closing. He said they came across a document that was done by a group of consultants that specialize in school district management and they did a comprehensive facility study and one of the criteria was the school site and Washington Elementary has a strength there because it is safe, residential, and there is not a lot of traffic that flows through there. He said school site was rated very high in that study. He said they feel Washington Elementary can be a part of the solution and reduce learner disruption and one of the ideas they brainstormed was taking some of the Bonneville neighborhood as well as east of the railyard and south of the Lewis & Clark Elementary boundary and it would give a nice tight boundary for Washington Elementary. Ms. Dayley asked if he had a map of what he was discussing and he said he would give it to Mr. Watson to share with the committee. Mr. Bates he was thankful to Mr. Watson for inviting the Washington Advocate Group to come and present to the committee and also thanked the dedication of the committee members. He said as he read through the minutes one thing he noticed that was not mentioned was the academic performance of the schools across the district. He said all of this information comes from the State Department of Education website. He said he focused on progression. He said at Washington Elementary they are in the 80th percentile in ELA, 90th percentile for Math and the school district's average is 50th percentile for ELA and 60th percentile for math. He said we would love to see a proposal where you do not close any school to be presented as an option and if you are debating between Washington Elementary and Tendoy Elementary, Washington Elementary has out-performed Tendoy Elementary. He said the IRI indicator showed an increase of 18% from the fall to the spring for Washington Elementary. He said teacher experience at Washington Elementary currently there are no teachers with 0 – 1 years of experience and 89% have over 6 years' experience. He said the district average is 73%. He said this is important when you look at the consequences of closing Washington Elementary. He said if we close Washington Elementary, we risk losing those teachers and all that experience. He said also on capacity when you look at it in a graph it is striking. He said over the last 7 years the district has had a drop in enrollment and most of it in elementary and Washington Elementary is the only school that has increased its enrollment over the years. It has had an increase of 26%. He said as a parent of Washington Elementary the academic performance - they know it and feel it and that is why they send their kids there. He said when they were deciding to send their kids to kindergarten they were accepted at Connor Academy and after walking through the school of Washington Elementary, they knew it was the best place for their kids. He said they cared more than anything about the academic performance. He said the district out-performs the charter schools in Pocatello but that is not the reputation in the community. He said finally he wants to touch on capacity numbers. He said the first set of numbers was presented to the Board when this committee was formed and it shows elementary capacity at 80% but when you go through the schools and you take classrooms not used as classrooms changes the capacity. He said in his opinion it is not an accurate picture. He said he is not disputing that there is an enrollment issue but that there are different ways of looking at the numbers. He said he works in a children's clinic and has therapists that work in American Falls and they are doing speech therapy in the hallway because they have no room and that is a risk we take when closing schools. He said they just want the Board to be looking at all of the consequences of the decision they make because it

affects more than the budget. Mr. Cameron said Washington Elementary has a parking problem and it is a non-issue from their perspective. He said a great example is what the community and City did at Lookout Point in created diagonal parking. He said the architecture resource they have been talking with said that with simple and minor adjustments they could have 20+ parking spaces. Ms. Dayley asked when there is a school event where the parents park and Ms. Stevens said most of them walk or park around the neighborhood. Mr. Bates said it would be 40+ parking spaces because they would have parking on both sides.

Mr. Cameron said in summary the City's plan is to grow inward and that needs to be considered. He said the academic performance at Washington Elementary is excellent and we should invest in it. He said their enrollment is increasing. He said they think there are really creative solutions possible. He said there are enough deep pockets around the table and minds that solve problems and they want to be a part of that. He said all the problems that have been discussed are solvable. He said they are actively pursuing the historic preservation and putting the school on the national historic registry and it opens up grant money. He said they would like to go down that path and it is a great opportunity to have money flow into the neighborhood and into the school. Ms. Dayley asked if they had looked at how that coincides with the school district owning it and Mr. Cameron said not yet but they want to be a part of the brainstorming to figure it out. Mr. Bates said he did present to the Board and at the end he got emotional and he understands how the committee would be defensive and their intent is not to attack or question but he would ask the committee to look at the recommendation through the human lens. He said this affects his kids. He said more than anything what they want is that the committee helps the Board of Trustees make the decision by giving them multiple recommendations to consider. He said they are the elected officials and they are the ones that need to make that decision. Ms. Dalton said she has heard a lot about creative solutions but she has not heard anything creative or ready anything creative except for moving boundaries and not closing schools – she asked if there was anything they had that is outside of what has been mentioned. Mr. Cameron said putting the school on the registry and looking at different grant opportunities. He said for example the City was really struggling to like Caldwell Park and they would throw three light strings on the trees and the neighborhood was not happy with that so they wrote a grant and now they have a partnership with the City and the community shows up to wrap the trees to a certain point and the City finishes it up for them so he knows that there can be good partnerships. He said he knows they can do that with the school and they need to feel engaged. He said they are stakeholders. Mr. Bates said they would like to ask the Board why enrollment is dropping and how can they address it and what can the district do to rebuild that. He said they have friends that have asked why the district does not start a magnet school within itself. He said they feel there has only been one option pushed forward to the Board but he feels there are other options to address the root problem. Ms. Dayley said the issue is that those things take a lot of time to consider and implement and it does not address the issue right now. Mr. Bates said they feel the Board should be given multiple options because this committee are not elected officials. Ms. Lloyd said the committee chose to look at Tendoy Elementary and Washington Elementary because of the structural issues and costs. Ms. Dayley asked how long it will take for them to hear from the historic registry and Mr. Cameron said it is a lengthy process but there is no timeline. Ms. Dayley asked if the Board decides to close Washington Elementary down can the building still be put on the registry and Mr. Cameron said yes, but they do not want it to be a building like Emerson or Bonnevillie and they do not want it to close and it should not be on the list to be considered to close.

Updated Information and Data

- Special Board Meeting – Tuesday, January 7th at 3:30 p.m.
- Tendoy and Washington Comparison Chart and Information
- Updated Enrollment Area Maps and Information

Mr. Watson said the Special Board Meeting will be Tuesday, January 7th at 3:30 p.m. and we will be able to give the two recommendations. He said the first recommendation will be closing Tendoy Elementary and the second recommendation will be to not close any school and balance out the numbers. He said with timelines he did not feel the committee had enough time to meet and put together a proposal and he was not comfortable going to the Board tomorrow night knowing the committee needed time to look at all the information. Mr. Watson asked Ms. Dalton and Ms. Dayley if they would be available to present to the Board. They both agreed.

Enrollment Areas Collaboration and Committee Work

- Committee Discussion, Collaboration and Input- ArcGIS (Geographic Information System)

Ms. Dayley asked how many kids actually walk to Tendoy Elementary and Washington Elementary as opposed to being bussed? Ms. Stevens said they have three busses and said probably 100 kids ride the bus. Mr. Watson said he can work on getting that data for the next meeting. Ms. Dalton asked what the radius of being bussed was and Mr. Watson said he thought it was close to 2 miles but he will get that information as well.

Mr. Watson said included in the packet was a comparison chart that the committee had asked for and this will be given to the Board tomorrow night as well. He said the numbers look a little different than what we have presented in prior meeting because we added site to the cost as well which includes a parking lot. He said Tendoy Elementary has a very tiny parking lot of around 10 parking spots. He said a lot of their staff members and the public park across the street at the church. He said he wanted to clarify those numbers. He said this is giving an ideal scenario of having funding to take care of all of those needs. He said the costs highlighted in red were listed in the report as poor condition. He said there are pros and cons on the list for Tendoy Elementary and Washington Elementary. He said for Tendoy Elementary the pros are central location and ADA accessibility and the cons are limited parking and limited space for drop off/pick up. He said for Washington Elementary the pro was the geographic location and the cons were not ADA accessible, street parking, no air-conditioning in the basement, significant upgrades needed for long-term use. Ms. Dayley asked if we could add the historical registry as a pro on the list for Washington and Mr. Watson said he needs to ask some questions before adding it but they will make mention of it to the Board. He said we also pulled out some verbiage blurb from the Facility Observation Report from Design West to add for the Board as well. He said Lincoln is not an option as far as closing an elementary school and closing it does not impact those numbers. He said a board member asked if we could move Lincoln into one of those buildings if an elementary closed. He said Head Start is federally funded and there are things they have purchased and they have to be used for that purpose because the school district does not own it. He said there are limitations with them moving over there. He said there is not enough space at Tendoy Elementary for both programs and the ADA accessibility part at Washington Elementary makes it not a viable option. He said they would need 14 classes and several other spaces with OT/PT. He said if they wanted to split the programs, they could possibly make that work. Ms. Stevens said Greenacres Elementary is centrally located and it would be a good place for Lincoln to be and they could also place the ERR programs at Lewis & Clark Elementary. Ms. Lloyd asked if we get federal money to fix those buildings and Mr. Watson said we do not get federal money, the district provides the building. He said we wanted to share this information to the Board and also let them know that closing Lincoln will not address the declining enrollment or staffing issues. Mr. Dixon said looking at the costs if you look at 20+ years then they are similar but if you focus on the 0-5 years the costs are bigger and substantial. Mr. Perry asked if the district has money set aside for the Washington Elementary repairs and Mr. Watson said no, it would have to be split up over time through the CIP process. Ms. Lloyd asked if the historic registry could come up with money if it could be spent just on Washington Elementary or if the money had to be spread out for other projects. Mr. Watson said grants can be ear-marked for specific things. Mr. Watson said we did not put pros and cons on Lincoln because we do not want it in a comparison with Tendoy Elementary and Washington Elementary.

Mr. Watson said the proposals and numbers were included in the packet. He said there was a comparison chart of all three with capacity, staffing, average class sizes. He said the only difference with Tendoy Elementary closing was Greenacres Elementary and Washington Elementary and all the other schools stayed the same from the Washington Elementary closure proposal. He said it does push Washington's class size closer to the 25 mark. He said also included was the balanced enrollment sheet. He said you can see a few of the average class sizes are a little higher and with this recommendation we would not have any staff to redistribute so it becomes harder to balance out the numbers. Ms. Dayley asked how this works when we have to lose teachers and Mr. Watson said we do not have that information from the legislature yet. Ms. Dayley asked if we get into a situation of too many students do we have to start overloading? Mr. Watson said yes, that is what we would have to do. Ms. Stevens

said at Washington they had a combo-class to make things work but it is not ideal. Mr. Watson said the staffing/resource piece becomes more challenging. Ms. Dalton asked how many 6th graders are in the district and asked if we could move them down into the elementary schools to address the capacity issue. Mr. Watson said that would be a significant shift not only for learners but for teachers as well. Mr. Muckerman said many of the schools would not be able to hold those 6th graders. Ms. Lloyd said those 6th graders would lose an experience that they get in middle school. Ms. Lloyd said when she was in the 6th grade, they had the option to move up to the middle school or stay in the elementary school. Mr. Watson you would have to have the discussion of how it affects freshman and it would be a lot to take on in the next few months. Mr. Muckerman said he did not feel that would be any benefit. Mr. Watson said we are also going to be looking at reducing staff depending on what they get from the state. Ms. Lloyd said they had schools for just kindergarten. Mr. Watson said bussing would not work to get them all to one school. Ms. Lloyd said she does not see the benefit of not closing a school.

Mr. Watson said included in the packet was a map of closing Tendoy Elementary and he said this would affect 1033 students and the only change was Greenacres Elementary and Washington Elementary. He said the other schools were not impacted as they were already shifted on the Washington Elementary closure proposal. Ms. Lloyd asked how does balancing the enrollment address the committee's goal of addressing declining enrollment. Mr. Muckerman said we were asked to do this by the Board, but it does not solve a problem. Mr. Watson said it balances out free and reduced numbers and the capacity pieces but it would come at a cost. Mr. Muckerman said sustainability needs to be looked at, he said it would be a lot of shifting. Ms. Dayley said it would be nice to know how many teachers we will have so we can figure out what the schools would be at with how many classes per grade level. Mr. Muckerman said things seemed to settle in a pretty good place when closing a school and when they looked at the balanced enrollment there were a lot of issues with inefficiencies splattered all over.

Mr. Watson said included in the packet was a map that reflected boundaries with the balanced enrollment numbers. He said you can see that some of the things were similar to what we did with the Washington Elementary closure. He said for example they moved the Indian Hills Elementary boundary south so Jefferson Elementary could pick up some of those learners. Ms. Lloyd asked why Lewis & Clark Elementary took a random square at the bottom of the boundary and Ms. Stevens said because of the number of kids in that section. Mr. Muckerman said in their defense the boundaries might look weird, but the bussing works really well. Ms. Reader said there were 67 in the green square that they moved into Lewis Clark Elementary boundaries and only 34 in the square moved into Tendoy Elementary boundaries. Mr. Watson said Wilcox Elementary took on a portion of Jefferson Elementary learners as well. He said this is just a proposal so if the committee sees other things to look at please share them. He said they did not cross any boundary lines but there are weird lines for boundaries. He said Greenacres Elementary, Tendoy Elementary and Edahow Elementary are similar to the Washington proposal. He said Gate City Elementary picked up a little bit because they lost a portion by the Grace Lutheran area. He said Ellis Elementary also picked up a little bit from Syringa Elementary. He said you can see when you look at the spreadsheet this would have a smaller effect on students of 655. He said it does not do a lot to the capacities. Ms. Kelsey said she knows Tendoy Elementary has a committee that wants to present to the Board but she asked what if the committee comes from left field and close two more schools. Ms. Lloyd said eventually we have to pick a school and Ms. Dayley said in reality with the declining enrollment, we close two schools. Mr. Dixon said the committee has looked at all the data and we need to make it clear to the Board why we made the choices we did and remind them they are the elected representatives and they need to make the decision. Ms. Lloyd said in reality we do not want to close a school but declining enrollment says we need to. Mr. Dixon said if the committee is good with both maps presented in the packet based on his math, the district would have to spend \$600,000 per year over the next 20 years if we did not close one. Ms. Warner asked how much we are losing every year and Mr. Watson said approximately \$6 million. He said the district reduced 14 positions last year and the \$4.2 million helped offset that but based on the funding there very likely could be reductions that will take place this year. Ms. Astin said what if the committee decides on the balanced enrollment and then asks the district to push out initiatives for getting enrollment up. Ms. Lloyd asked if we have plans to increase enrollment and Mr. Muckerman said not just at the district level but at the state level with talking about vouchers that is going to be overarching and they will attach money to each kid and the effect on public schools will be detrimental in public schools funding. He said the overall trend will not go up despite our best efforts. Mr.

Watson said we do have to do a good job of marketing ourselves and you cannot compare apples to apples. He said in this day and age school of choice there will be more and more options and it will be more competitive and we will do our best to address declining enrollment. He said he does not think it would be reasonable to think we are going to turn this around to where we do not have to do anything. Ms. Lloyd asked if we could do an online program for homeschooling and Mr. Watson said an online option could be possible but we have not looked at it but in the elementary learners it was minimal that participated when offered. He said you also would have to pull FTE from the classrooms to do that. Mr. Muckerman said some elementary learners did okay but a lot of them struggled. Mr. Watson said there is a difference between homeschool and online school. Ms. Warren asked how do you bring in more students and aside from telling people to come here we don't have control over that. Ms. Warren said she does not know how we could address that problem. Ms. Dalton said she feels a lot of issues with public schools are at the state level so she does not feel it is anything that can be addressed here. She said her problem with the schools is what the teachers have to report at the state level. Ms. Warren said maybe we need to divulge the benefits that the district is outdoing in areas over the charter schools and get that out to the public so that they are aware. Mr. Dixon said he would like to present these to the Board and feels like as a committee we did a good job on optimizing capacity and equitable access and he said also we hit the mark of minimizing disruptions but maintaining efficiency was a wash but we did a great job of planning for the future – he said he would like to present to the Board the option of closing a school plus the other two options but tell them why we are presenting these.

Ms. Astin asked if this is slated to happen next year and Mr. Watson said if there is not a decision by February or March it would be hard to make it happen by next year. He said the special meeting will be January 7th and there will also be public hearings for input tentatively on January 13th. He said the Board might ask the committee to reconvene or take action on a recommendation in February.

Ms. Lloyd asked if they want to see a proposal for closing every school and Mr. Watson said no, they asked for Tendoy Elementary and balancing enrollment. He said they could come back and ask us for other proposals, but they have not yet. Mr. Watson said the Board can also choose not to do anything and we can maintain status quo.

Discussion/Questions/Resources

Meeting Adjourned at 6:34 p.m.