



Cumberland Elementary School Boundary Discussion

From time to time, adjustments to school boundary lines within school districts nationwide may become necessary. These adjustments aim to accommodate changes in overall student populations within a town and/or shifts in the concentration of students across a school district. In Cumberland, the persistent increase in student enrollment over several years, coupled with ongoing elementary school renovations, has prompted the district to consider modifying elementary school boundaries. The goal is to achieve a balanced distribution of the 2200-plus elementary student population across the five schools.

Several factors play a crucial role in the reconsideration of school boundaries. The current and projected enrollment figures play a major part in this process. Additionally, the distribution of student populations in different parts of the town and the locations of schools, as well as the roadways serving them, are essential considerations. Efficient bus routing for students to their respective schools also factors into this decision-making process.

In the following discussion, various elements contributing to this process are explored, shedding light on the ongoing discussion about elementary school boundaries in Cumberland.

Enrollment

Enrollment in Cumberland has been consistently increasing over the past several years, surpassing the projections provided to the district. Specifically, at the elementary level, Cumberland has witnessed a notable rise in K-5 students from 2023 in 2019 to 2230 in 2024. From October 2023 to the holiday break, typically a period of stable enrollment, the district experienced an addition of 26 new enrollments at the K-5 level. Since January 2, 2024, there has been a net increase of 11 students at the elementary level. Given these ongoing trends and the existing enrollment forecasts, it is anticipated that student enrollment will continue to go up in the district.

School Construction and Building Capacities

Cumberland is currently undergoing significant changes in its elementary school infrastructure, including renovations and additions to four schools, with the possibility of a new elementary school pending the BF Norton project's finalization. The BF Norton

"new school" process involves several steps, including planning board approval and Town Council bond authorization.

When undertaking school construction projects, Cumberland adheres to specific guidelines set by the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE). RIDE specifies the recommended student capacity based on the school's square footage, and for renovations, emphasizes incorporating 21st-century education elements, such as open space areas known as learning commons.

Cumberland Hill and Garvin Memorial Elementary have completed renovations and new additions, both designed with a capacity of 432 students using a 3-track model (3 track school = 3 grade 1's, 3 grade 2's, etc.). Currently, Cumberland Hill has 429 students enrolled, with the potential to shift to around 419 depending on next year's school boundary decisions. Garvin Memorial has 410 students enrolled, and this number may increase by 10-12 students for the next year based on boundary choices.

Despite the increased capacity in these two newly renovated schools, the continuous influx of students has prompted Cumberland to reconsider how it balances student populations across its five elementary schools.

This year marks the ongoing renovation of Ashton Elementary, following the completion of an addition last year. Once finished, Ashton will transition into a 3-track school, designed for a recommended student population of 432. Historically, Ashton primarily operated as a 2-track school. However, due to a surge in enrollment last year, a third kindergarten, a third grade 1, and a third grade 3 were added to accommodate the growing student numbers.

This shift is important to our discussion about Community School, which is transitioning from a 5-track to a 4-track school. The 5-year Capital Plan, introduced in 2018 and approved by RIDE in 2020, initially envisioned that students relocating from Community could be accommodated at Ashton, leveraging its new 3rd track. However, this plan faces challenges as Ashton is already operating as a partial 3-track school today.

Community School, currently accommodating 675 students, surpasses RIDE standards for capacity. As outlined in the 2020 Capital Plan, the intention was to shift Community from a 5-track to a 4-track school (575 capacity) through a two-phase process. The initial phase, completed last summer, involved the construction of a new addition featuring an art room, an additional classroom, and a cafeteria tailored for a 4-track school. The second phase is scheduled for the 24-25 school year, during which students will temporarily relocate to the transitional building. By the 25-26 school year, they will return to the refurbished Community School.

The transition of Community from a 5-track to a 4-track school calls for the relocation of approximately 120 students. It is important to note that the initial plan in 2020 to place all students at Ashton is no longer feasible, given that Ashton is already a partial 3-track school.

BF Norton is slated to have approximately 404 students for next year. This number puts them near their current capacity. In the current model before the School Committee, BF would have 3 tracks in all grades except grade 1, where we would see an extra 4th track. This is simply due to the student population in the BF boundary area. This extra 4th class in a grade is also repeated at Ashton in grades 1 and 2 for next year. Additionally, Community maintains an extra 5th class to allow for rising 5th graders to stay at Community for their final year. Garvin will also have an extra 4th class of grade 3. The ability to add these extra classes is done by looking for additional instructional spaces in the respective schools.

Considering the enrollment growth in town and the likelihood of continued student increases throughout this and the next school year, the model includes provisions to absorb new students in various grades. For instance, grade 2, while full at Garvin and Cumberland Hill, has some capacity for new students at Ashton and Community School.

In the event that the new BF Norton School is established (potential opening in the fall of 2027), the district is likely to revisit boundary adjustments for the 27-28 school year. A new BF Norton, a 4-track school similar to Community, would have a capacity of 575 students, offering an opportunity to alleviate crowding at the other 4 elementary schools.

It is important to note that discussions about the need for boundary changes were underway in pre-pandemic times during school committee meetings, indicating that the proposed changes in elementary school boundaries were not sudden but part of ongoing considerations.

Town Geography and Logistics

The town of Cumberland has a wedge-like shape, and the arrangement of schools within the town, the distribution of students in different areas, and the presence of three main roadways (Mendon Road, Diamond Hill Road, and Nate Whipple Highway) all play a role in determining school boundaries. The efficient creation of bus routes for these boundaries is also a crucial part of the overall process.

Creating a school boundary involves capturing a series of streets and neighborhoods that total up to the appropriate amount of students, per grade, that will fit in a school. In some cases, situations will occur where a particular neighborhood is closer to one school vs. another, but that neighborhood may go to the school that is further away. This

type of scenario is not unique to Cumberland. An example of this currently exists in town with the New Clark Road area of town that currently goes to Ashton, when in this case they are very close to Cumberland Hill.

Looking ahead to the potential opening of the new BF Norton in 2027, the district would consider filling BF Norton from the south to the north. This approach aims to balance elementary school numbers more effectively, leveraging the new 4-track school in the southern part of town to alleviate enrollment pressure on other schools. Filling from south to north would result in the northern boundary of BF Norton being in close proximity to Garvin Elementary. In the northern part of town, a similar shift might occur, redirecting outlying areas like Burnt Swamp Road to Cumberland Hill.

It is acknowledged that adjusting school boundaries can be challenging. The information provided here offers context on the current enrollment situation and potential changes in school boundaries for the coming years.

Why the Current Boundary Change Proposal

The task at hand was to change Community School from a 5 track School to a 4 track School. The first step in this process was to look at concentrations of students in the various streets and neighborhoods in the southern Community School boundary area. Several areas were modeled to see if the right number of students, by grade level, were present to allow for a move from Community to Ashton or Garvin.

The Windsong, Pound and Little Pond County areas captured approximately 94 students and this group did have the right grade level of students to fit within the Ashton school classroom plan. The approximate 36 students at Lippitt Estates also fit into our current Garvin classroom plan. It is understood that this plan has a cascading effect and the question often asked is why not have the Community student group go right to Garvin? The answer is, it was looked at and it was determined not to be a logistically sound idea to recommend to the School Committee.

From a busing standpoint, transporting students to Garvin from the Pound, Little Pond County area would substantially lengthen bus route times. Modeling with the bus company, it was determined it would add 20-25 minutes for this same bus run to Garvin. Conversely, the Lippitt Estates bus run would be approximately the same time for Ashton or Garvin.

The Lippitt Estates area is predominantly below the Pound/ Little Pond area and closer to Garvin School. While Lippitt is geographically closer to Ashton School than Garvin, like the New Clark example given earlier, it sometimes works out where a school further

away from a home is the target school in a boundary area, keeping in mind the overall balance of over 2200 students in five schools is the overarching goal.

Given the substantial student concentration (currently 36) in the Lippitt area and the compatibility of their grade configuration, relocating this student group to Garvin is deemed the most logistically sensible option.

It is worth noting that since the presentation of this plan to the School Committee on December 12, 2023, the team responsible for this initiative has continued refining the model by exploring different street combinations. To date, the current boundary change model presented is our best thinking on how to balance our elementary student population.

Waivers and Rising 5th Graders

Each year, as part of our standard procedure, the District has established a process that enables parents to request a waiver from the assigned school boundary area. Parents can submit their waiver requests by emailing the District at Laurie.Carr@cumberlandschools.org or calling (401) 658 1600 x 303. These requests are collected throughout the year, and in the first week of August, they are processed and approved based on available space. Historically, we have been able to approve over 80% of such requests.

Considering the upcoming academic year, which may present unique challenges in terms of enrollment and waivers, we are committed to approving as many waivers as possible within the physical constraints of each school.

In the current boundary model presented to the School Committee, there is a provision for rising 5th graders (28 students) to remain in their current school, providing parents can arrange their own transportation. Towards the end of September, we make an effort to offer busing for students who may not normally qualify, depending on available space.

If the School Committee approves a plan this winter, allowing rising 5th graders to stay in their current school, families will be contacted to determine their preference for the 5th-grade year, either remaining in the current school or relocating to the new elementary school. For 5th graders with siblings, parents can fill out a waiver to have the sibling join the 5th grader. It is important to note that, like all waivers, this process would need to be repeated on a yearly basis.

Final Thoughts

All of our elementary schools continue to demonstrate strong signs of academic growth and Cumberland remains a top performing school district in the state. Our elementary schools are all using the same High Quality Curriculum for Math and ELA. Our Principals work diligently with Central Office to implement common curricula, and assessment practices across all our elementary and Middle Schools. In addition, our systems and practices to support students at all levels are mirrored throughout the district. Attending one of our schools vs. another poses no difference and or lack of resources as compared to the other.

Lastly, our district, teachers, staff, and administrators have worked tirelessly over the past 10 years to raise the academic standing and quality of the product we provide our students. We rank among the top in both ELA and Mathematics, along with the likes of Barrington, East Greenwich, and Jamestown.

We are very fortunate to have exceptional teachers and administrators who collectively strive for one goal – to provide the best education for our students.

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