

Parents speak out on boundaries at forum

By SUE BUCK
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Enrollment trends, classroom space and a need to fill home schools first combined in a special parent forum discussion on redistricting Feb. 6 at East Middle School.

More than 100 people attended the forum, which was held in the school cafeteria. They were told that officials aren't taking the boundary decisions lightly.

"It will never be easy for people when your kids are affected," said Farmington School Superintendent Bob Maxfield. "It's a real tough decision for people to make."

Kindergarten enrollment, which runs from 8 a.m.-1 p.m. Feb. 25-March 1 at each elementary school, will determine key overflow numbers. Some parents registered concerns about having

children split between two schools.

Parents suggested ways to handle the kindergarten enrollment process including sibling preference for those who already have students attending the school, establishing a lottery or giving preference to walkers over busers.

Although the trend is toward declining enrollment at the kindergarten level, school officials say it is still possible that there will be a few more kindergarten students over capacity.

The district is evaluating the options and expects to communicate a decision soon.

Connie Knie, a Gill parent, thought the attendance area review committee did the best it could, and she never felt excluded from the process.

"We lost our year 'round program which opened up quite a

few spaces at Gill," she said. "For those who are coming into Gill, we're great and we would love to have you."

Tracy Garcia, a Beechview parent, said she was concerned that the deadline for elementary School of Choice registration ended Feb. 8. The deadline precluded the choice of that option before the school district had all its plans in place.

"That's the first I realized that and I made a note to look into it," Zurvalec said.

The district announced Friday it will extend the deadline for elementary school of choice until March 15, which is after the kindergarten registration process.

After the public forum Thursday, the attendance area review committee met separately. Maxfield suggested a short informational piece be distributed to

parents before school break began Feb. 8 to discuss the progress of the attendance area review committee and a timeline.

Principals will individually answer some of the questions posed by parents who filled out cards to speak at the forum, Zurvalec said.

Maxfield praised the process, calling it thoughtful. He complimented the committee members.

"You guys ought to be congratulated, thanked, applauded, embraced for the job you took on," Maxfield said. "Sure we could do things differently. Sure some people were contentious. But they had a chance to be heard. It's almost Solomon-like. I said to people, 'Ten or 15 years from now when you are on the board of education you will remember this night as the night you got involved.'"

Not everyone's happy Kelly Iles, an Alameda parent, faulted the committee process, because she didn't believe it included enough clear, initial information when they asked or had enough early input from Gill parents. Other parents agreed, saying they felt left out because the committee included only the principal from each school and his or her chosen representative. Some comments made at the

Plans go to board

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School officials and committee members are ready to present their plans to address expected overcrowding at Beechview, Kenbrook and

Longacre Elementary Schools next year.

The Farmington school board will view the alternatives at 5:45 p.m. Feb. 10, and also take up the issue on their regular agenda at 7:30 p.m.

Please see PLANS, A7

forum disparaged both Muirwood residents and apartment residents in general, portraying them as transient. Muirwood residents on average don't move frequently, school officials have said.

Frank Luscri, a Gill parent, said classrooms are disrupted when children move in and out during the year. "Kids have to get up to speed and then they are out," he said.

Zurvalec said: "We believe that all the children in Farmington schools, no matter where they live, no matter what kind of home they reside in, are welcome in our schools and we will educate them. We do not take and parcel them out."

Maxfield brought up the subject later when the committee met.

"Did you all feel like the ugly

issue was dealt with OK, the apartment issue?" Maxfield asked. "I think Sue's (Zurvalec's) answer was the appropriate answer."

The Muirwood community needs to be reassured, Zurvalec said.

"Conversely, to some parents at Gill, it would be comforting for them to actually find out that these are real children who look a lot like our kids," Maxfield said. "Take back the label and look at individual kids."

Theresa Davis, a committee member, echoed similar sentiments. "Muirwood parents are welcomed and embraced," Davis said.

Bill Steinmetz, a Longacre parent, said Muirwood is a pretty stable community. But, he had a request: "Make a fair ratio of apartment to home kids."



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