

**West Seattle Deserves Better:
A Case for Balanced School Attendance Areas**

The Seattle School District recently proposed a new school assignment boundary for West Seattle. The boundary was established to encourage attendance at neighborhood schools, reduce transportation and administrative costs, and provide a fair and predictable assignment plan for families. Within the coming month, the Seattle School Board will define two attendance areas for Madison Middle School and West Seattle High School (north/west portion of West Seattle) or Denny Middle School and Sealth High School (south/east West Seattle).

Unfortunately, the most recent (Nov 3) proposed attendance area boundary for middle and high schools in West Seattle has the un-intended consequence of creating two attendance areas that are very different from each other:

- The population of proposed north/west attendance area is more affluent and lacks ethnic diversity.
- The population of the proposed south/east attendance area is less affluent and more ethnically diverse.

We know from past experience in Seattle that the population of any school attendance area defines the population of the school. We can do better than the recent proposal.

Numerous studies show that successful schools need diversity. This includes cultural diversity that brings a range of perspectives and challenge assumptions about learning and achievement. There is also a strong relationship between affluence and school achievement. Both these elements will contribute to the strongest possible schools in West Seattle.

The line between the proposed north/west and south/east attendance areas will define our student populations, and will contribute to the success or failure of our schools now ... and well into the future. This decision is of critical importance to our communities and our schools.

- All of our West Seattle schools deserve to benefit from a diverse student population.
- Our community deserves two attendance areas with schools that feature diverse student populations with a range of income levels, cultural backgrounds and experiences.

We request that the district redraw the attendance area maps, more in line with the original proposal for Sealth—and make it the same for Sealth and Denny. The goal is to have areas that:

- Are roughly equivalent in terms of income and ethnic diversity, as reflected in the West Seattle demographic overall. This will allow each school to develop to its highest potential over time
- Provide opportunities for students to walk to school and attend their neighborhood school as identified by the Seattle School District.
- Insure continuation of positive momentum for successful programs such as the IB program at Chief Sealth which is benefiting from a full range of socio-economic and ethnic diversity.

Proposed Attendance Area Boundaries for West Seattle

Facts

Free or Reduced-Price School Lunch

A common measure of student affluence is the number of students receiving free lunch or reduced-price school lunch. Schools with a higher percentage of students using this program have higher rates of poverty. The south/east attendance area, as currently configured, has a much higher rate of poverty as measured by the school lunch program. For recent census data on income levels, see page 3. The following information is provided through the Seattle Times School Guide for 2009.

North/West

0

No elementary schools

In the north/west area
have a majority of students receiving
free or reduced-price school lunch

South/East

80

80% of elementary schools

In the south/east area
have a majority of students receiving
free or reduced-price school lunch.

Percentage of Students Meeting State Standards

A measure of student achievement is the ability of students to meet State of Washington standards through annual tests. The following figures report fourth grader performance in meeting all three state standards through the WASL in 2009.

North/West

60

Almost 60% of fourth graders

In the north/ west meet or exceed state standards.

South/East

25

Only 25% of fourth graders

In the south/east meet or exceed state standard

Percentage White

The Seattle School District collects data on the ethnicity of students throughout the City. West Seattle is one of the most diverse areas of Seattle. A high percentage of population that self-identifies as “white” indicates less diversity.

North/West

70

Almost 70% of students

In the north/west identify themselves as “white”.

South/East

22

22% of students

In the south/east identify themselves as “white.”

Don't let this level of inequality become permanent in West Seattle. Contact your school board member now—and ask for more equity. sherry.carr@seattleschools.org, harium.martin-morris@seattleschools.org, peter.maier@seattleschools.org, cheryl.chow@seattleschools.org, steve.sundquist@seattleschools.org, mary.bass@seattleschools.org, michael.debell@seattleschools.org, trlibros@seattleschools.org superintendent@seattleschools.org

Comparison of Seattle School District Proposed Attendance Areas for Middle Schools and High Schools in West Seattle

(Sources: Seattle Public School District, Seattle Times School Guide, US Census Bureau 2000 as reported by the City of Seattle)

