

Questions about Proposed Boundary Changes and School Closings

1. What are the reasons that the school district is looking at so many changes in school boundaries?

A recent study of the elementary school boundaries included a review of where students live and how many students are currently served in each building. The study resulted in a recommendation that students at three of the district's smallest schools (Washington, Pusey and Gunn) could be served within other nearby schools. With fewer schools, the school district would be able to be more efficient in using tax dollars for operations. As a general rule of thumb, a school that serves more students can be operated more efficiently, especially if it is operating with a student population at or near its capacity. For example, a school the size of Washington approximately 39,000 sq. ft (designed as a school to have two of each grade-prek-5) could serve 322 students at an average of 23 students per classroom. There are 274 students in prek-5 students at Washington (including more than 80 children who are preschool aged).

Another reason is that the District would also be able to use the separate capital improvement fund to upgrade the remaining schools and build a new, modern school to serve the students in the eastern part of the Abraham Lincoln High School attendance area. A goal is to have all students in the Council Bluffs Schools have the same opportunity to be educated in modern school facilities.

Gunn and Pusey families have been aware of the plan to consider closing their schools for more than a year. However, the decision to include Washington as one of the proposed schools to be closed was prompted more recently by significant cuts in state funding to the school district.

2. When will the decisions be made and how will they be communicated so that parents know which school their children will attend? **Washington administrators and staff are in the process of identifying all the students who will be re-assigned to attend Bloomer or Lewis & Clark next year. Once identified, the families will be notified over the next two weeks individually through a phone call and letter. The Bloomer and Lewis & Clark Principals will also receive a notification with the list of family names, so they can contact families and welcome them to their new school.**
3. Which children will receive district busing to school after boundaries are changed? Will there be opportunities for transportation in evenings? How will parents without transportation get to school conferences?
For 2010-11: All Washington Elementary students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade re-assigned to Lewis & Clark or Bloomer will be eligible for free busing. There will be at least six bus stops for students attending Bloomer and every student will walk less than four blocks to the closest bus stop.

For K-5 students re-assigned to Lewis & Clark, there will be no change to the bus stop located along Parkwild Drive. The bus will just go to Lewis & Clark instead of Washington. A second bus stop will be added on Millard Street, north of Parkwild if there are students residing in that area.

For 2011-12: All Washington students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade re-assigned to Hoover who live west of Washington School will be provided transportation. The district has yet to determine which students residing east of Washington School will receive busing to Hoover.

If families choose to transfer to another building, the district will not provide transportation.

The school will work with parents who may need assistance getting to school for meetings and conferences.

4. What will happen to the principal, teachers, and staff members who are now at Washington if/when the school is closed? How many jobs will be lost?
Most employees will be eligible to fill vacant positions at other schools within the District.
5. Will the free after-school program at Washington be continued at the schools the students will be attending in Fall, 2011?
The free 21st Century Community Learning Center program offered after school at Washington is funded by a short-term that may or may not be available in the future. The District will partner with other organizations as much as possible to offer after-school opportunities for children. The Kids & Company program serves students before and after school at Lewis & Clark, Bloomer and Hoover and is a great option for families.
6. How will the change in schools affect the teacher-student ratio? Will class sizes be larger?
The District sets an average class size at the elementary school between 21-25 students per classroom. Often times the class size is reduced during the times of the day focused on reading and writing lessons. A larger school with more classes of 3rd graders, for example, should fall within that range, depending on the number of students in each grade level.
7. How does closing Washington (and other schools) save money for the district?
The savings in operational costs would occur over time. Money would be saved through reduced costs of electricity and natural gas, cleaning supplies and paper goods, for example. There are 45 employees who serve the children who attend Washington Elementary. While many of the employees would continue to serve children in other buildings, the overall number of employees needed in the elementary schools across the district would likely be reduced. Savings in the cost for the building principal, secretary, library clerk and custodians would be achieved as they are shifted to other positions in the district where vacancies occur.

In addition to the savings from the district's operations budget (general fund), there would be no need to invest dollars from the district's capital improvement fund to upgrade the building to meet modern standards, including handicapped accessibility.

8. Why were improvements made to Washington if you are now going to close the school? **The proposal to re-assign students to other elementary schools from Washington was not developed prior to the time building upgrades and improvements were made. Students have benefitted from the major improvements to Washington, including the following since 2003:**
 - **\$258,000 in 2003-04 for plumbing, fire sprinkler system, restroom renovation and some electrical**
 - **\$280,000 in 2003-2004 for new windows, some masonry restoration and tuck pointing**
 - **\$1,220,000 in 2004-05 for heating/AC/ventilation system replacement, including some electrical upgrades**

9. Will Washington students receive the same technology, textbooks and classroom support next year if the school will be closed in 2011? **Absolutely. All resources, including technology, are easily installed and can be transferred to new sites in the future. The Washington students will continue to receive all the quality services and support, based on needs and as provided by all Council Bluffs Schools.**

10. What will happen to help students transition to their new schools? **As mentioned above, the Bloomer and Lewis and Clark Principals will receive a notification with the list of family names, so they can contact families and welcome them to their new school. As a part of this welcoming process, Bloomer and Lewis and Clark schools plan on holding an "Open House" yet this school year, so families can visit their new school. If needed families can also set up individual times to meet with the Principals, in order to ask questions or address any concerns.**

11. What will happen to Washington School after it is closed as an elementary school? **No plans have been made on the future use of the building. It is likely the district will continue to own the building and use it for another purpose. It is also possible the property could be sold or leased.**