

WCASD Redistricting

Frequently Asked Questions – October 2019

1. Why do school districts change or “redistrict” their attendance boundaries?

As neighborhood demographics change over time, schools often see shifts in enrollment. Some schools may become crowded while others may have empty classrooms. It's up to each school district to carefully monitor and evaluate when it's time to change attendance boundaries to accommodate these changing populations.

2. Why is West Chester going through the process of redistricting?

Our district population has seen a lot of change. Our 2019-20 enrollment is at 12,079, an all-time high. In addition, 3,200 new housing units have been approved within district boundaries, and we project our enrollment to approach 13,000 students over the next seven years. These enrollment projections have been carefully calculated with the help of experienced demographers who specialize in school enrollment and take into consideration which kinds of housing units tend to bring school children and what percentage of families choose public schools.

As we have been renovating, we've been placing additions on some of our schools and using modular units to accommodate growth. However, the growth has exploded and in 2018 our School Board authorized the construction of a new elementary school, Greystone Elementary in northern West Goshen Township. It's set to open in Fall 2021.

3. When will we start the redistricting process?

We will begin the process in the fall of 2019 by assembling a committee to analyze attendance boundaries and identify issues to consider. It will be comprised of school administrators, Board members, teachers, transportation staff, and parents. The committee will consider current school enrollments and projected enrollments. They will also develop scenarios that will shift attendance boundaries to balance our school enrollments.

Information will be sent to parents and staff asking for volunteers to be part of the committee. The superintendent will evaluate requests to ensure there is a balance of representation from all schools and all parts of the district. An email address will be set up for residents to provide input, all of which will be shared with our committee and School Board. The committee is expected to present a report to the Board in June 2020.

4. What enrollment criteria will be used to develop new attendance boundaries?

Our goal is to bring all schools into 90-98% of their enrollment capacity. This provides adequate space for anticipated growth and is considered a 'best practice' in the public school industry. We will also strive to balance our school populations so that the number of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch at any school is within eight percentage points of the district average of 17.4%. "Free and reduced lunch" is a federal program to help qualifying families offset the cost of lunches. Our School Board is committed to balancing these numbers so that we don't inadvertently create some schools with much higher rates of lower income students.

5. Will my school be impacted by the redistricting?

It's likely that most, if not all, of our elementary schools may face some redistricting. Many of our elementary schools do not have any room for expansion, and are expected to see enrollment growth with their current attendance boundaries. We will need to reduce student populations in some schools in order to provide space, and therefore some students in each of the following schools will most likely need to be redistricted:

- a. Glen Acres
- b. Mary C. Howse
- c. Westtown-Thornbury
- d. Fern Hill
- e. Exton
- f. Peirce Middle School

In addition, some students in the other elementaries in the district may also need to be redistricted in order to accommodate enrollment shifts.

However, we will do this with the utmost of care and try to “grandfather” as many students as possible through transitions so that students who are nearing the end of their time in a school aren't moving to a different school.

6. The thoughts of my child having to switch schools is very upsetting. My child has formed friendships and made connections at our school. We even purchased our home based on our attendance boundaries. Is this process fair?

The process of redistricting is one of the most emotional and difficult that any school district goes through. Unfortunately in order to operate in a sound manner and provide enough space, we must shift our attendance boundaries to match enrollment. We are extremely careful about the way in which we analyze attendance boundaries and make decisions. Every effort will be made to ease transitions for students and to move as few students as possible. We are very sensitive to the difficult nature of this process and we will do our very best to be fair.

7. What other transition plans are you considering?

We will be sure to include transition plans for changes, so that students who will be moving from one school to another will have an opportunity to meet teachers, the principal, and other students in the new school before they move at the beginning of the school year.

We will allow all high school students (grades 9-12) to finish at their current school so long as they can find transportation to/from school.

We will Maintain middle school-to-high school feeder patterns (Fugett MS sends to East HS; Peirce MS sends to Henderson HS; Stetson MS sends to Rustin HS.)

We will consider eliminating the split feeder pattern at Fern Hill Elementary School (Fern Hill students attend both Peirce and Fugett middle schools).

We will consider reducing the number of elementary schools that service the borough of West Chester. The borough of West Chester covers one square mile. Currently we send students who live in the borough to six of our 10 elementary schools. If we can reduce that number, and send students to a school that may be closer to their neighborhood, we will consider doing so.

8. Will high school students who are being redistricted to a different feeder pattern be allowed to finish at their current high schools?

Yes, any student who has started in 9th grade by the fall of 2021 will be able to finish in their current high school as long as they can find transportation to and from school.

9. Will elementary and/or middle school students who are being redistricted to a different school be allowed to finish at their current schools?

In the past, we have allowed students to finish the last grade level in their respective schools such as fifth grade, and eighth grade. Due to the rapid number of students enrolling in the district, buildings may not have the capacity for us to be able to do that. A decision will be made at the conclusion of the redistricting report.

10. When I hear that our schools are crowded, I'm concerned about class sizes. Are our class sizes getting larger?

Class sizes are not getting larger, and with rare exception we have maintained our class size guidelines, which are:

K – First Grade: Maximum of 25 students

Grades 2 – 3: Maximum of 27 students

Grades 4 – 5: Maximum of 30 students

Middle and High School Classes: Scheduled at an average of 25 students

On the rare occasion that class sizes exceed our guidelines we have added a classroom aide to help with instruction and class management.

11. How will you keep me informed?

Community updates will be provided via email, website, as well as public meetings. An email will be set up to provide input. All input will be shared with our committee and School Board.