May 17, 2018
Belle Haven Parent Group Launches Petition to leave Ravenswood for MPCSD

Comments from this article:

Belle Haven resident
Menlo Park: Belle Haven
on May 18, 2018 at 12:30 pm

28 people like this

Belle Haven kids are every bit as deserving of an excellent education as all other kids in Menlo Park. It has been an uphill struggle to have the MP city council or the director of the library pay any attention to the children who live here, the education they get, the library services they receive, and thus the opportunities in life and careers they will ultimately have access to.
It's appropriate to address what little the city council has done. The former mayor only called a meeting last year because she was pressed into calling one. The urgency came from BH residents who deserve all credit for persevering despite little to no support from the city. They are heroes and have been for many years.

https://www.almanacnews.com/news/2018/05/17/belle-haven-group-launches-petition-to-transfer-school-from-ravenswood-district

There have been three previous secessions of neighborhoods in Menlo Park from the Ravenswood City School District in the past several decades, transfer proponents said: Menlo Oaks, Suburban Park and the Willows. Those households took with them their property tax base into the Menlo Park City School District, which is considered a self-sustaining "basic aid" district that generates enough taxes per student to not rely on any state funding.

The Ravenswood district does rely on state funding because its property tax base is not sufficient to meet a certain per-student funding baseline.

Because of the difference in how the schools are funded, it's likely that the amount of the area's property tax base would be a major factor in whether the Menlo Park district would opt to take on the new territory.

Bims challenged residents of the Willows, Suburban Park and Menlo Oaks neighborhoods to return to the Ravenswood district if they feel it's important to not leave that district in the lurch by reducing its property tax base, since the state automatically pays the difference based on the number of children who attend the school.

"I doubt we'll have many takers," she said.

"It shouldn't be on the backs of the Belle Haven neighborhood to say, 'You need to stay behind,'" said Rose Bickerstaff, a member of the homeowners' association. "Did people think about (that) when the Willows, Menlo Oaks and Suburban Park pulled out?"

September 25, 2013
SUHSD Board Meeting Minutes
Ravenswood Administrator voices
https://www.seq.org/documents/Board%20of%20Trustees/General%20Information/2013-14%20Agendas%20Background%20and%20Minutes/10-09-13%20Minutes.pdf

Discussion of Interim Changes to AR5116.1, Intradistrict Open Enrollment & Adjustment Transfer	Dr. Lianides advised that this proposed change to the Administrative Regulation AR5661.1, Intradistrict Open Enrollment and Adjustment Transfers, would allow for a greater number of graduating students in Ravenswood City Elementary District to attend Menlo-Atherton High School and for a greater number of graduating Tierra Linda students to attend Carlmont High School. To provide some background discussions began a year ago concerning enrollment growth challenges for SUHSD in the year 2020. This administrative regulation would address the issue of keeping communities intact, which was clearly a priority of parents attending community meetings last spring. The Superintendent advised that for many years the Ravenswood City Elementary District community has been divided into three SUHSD attendance areas (Carlmont, Menlo-Atherton and Woodside high schools). The Carlmont students living in East Palo Alto have a long bus ride to get to school. Open enrollment has allowed a large percentage of the Ravenswood population coming into the district to attend M-A already. The proposed change in the administrative regulation would take us one step closer to addressing the issue of keeping communities intact. It also preserves students' ability to go to high school with their cohort communities who attend Las Lomitas district schools, are in the Tinsley program, and those students attending Tierra Linda Middle School. Trustee Weiner said he had been in conversation with the Superintendent, and what has emerged was that to the extent there is capacity the open enrollment requests would be granted. He noted that on AR5661.1(c) and (d), under *Boundary Exceptions,* Items 4. and 5., in the last paragraph, the words *may* should be changed to *will*. The expectation is that this transfer process would happen before the capacity of sites was determined for open enrollment. Trustee Du Bois said she was not comfortable solving issues with open enrollment. In Ravenswood City Elementary District there are many kids living in poverty, do not have families, and are not able to fill out the forms. These students are not going to be helped by this policy.

Superintendent Lianides said he has been in conversation with Ravenswood Superintendent Dr. Gloria Hernandez and to help facilitate the process, SUHSD District Parent Coordinator Carmina Chavez will be presenting open enrollment information to eighth graders. Ravenswood district has already provided us with eighth grade data. To help with the application process we have developed a pre-printed transfer request form which includes the eighth grader's current high school assignment. The intent is to reach every eighth grader in the Ravenswood district through community meetings and working with the K-8 school staffs. This approach would also provide us with direct indicators as to what students and their parents want. Dr. Lianides advised that there were students who prefer to attend Carlmont, Woodside, or Stanford Charter School.

Dr. James Lovelace, Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources, Ravenswood City Elementary District, advised that everyone in a community is affected where there is no neighborhood high school. He expressed his appreciation for this effort and said that the Board was helping a community in pain.

Dr. Gloria Hernandez, Superintendent, Ravenswood City Elementary District, advised a plan has been developed for adjustment transfers for this year's eighth grade students, and Ravenswood parents will be contacted concerning high school. Dr. Hernandez said this was a great step in the right direction. The lack of not having a high school is still felt in our community, and that high school was closed almost 30 years ago.

Avani Patel, Costaño School/49er Academy, and an advocate for the Ravenswood community, expressed concern with the Administrative Regulation (AR) and the words *granting preference*. In the AR under *Boundary Exceptions,* both Fair Oaks students, *automatically assigned toM-A* and La Entrada students *will be allowed to transfer to M-A*. Ms. Patel expressed concern regarding the statement concerning Ravenswood students, *students may request a transfer to M-A and the Superintendent may grant such requests to the extent that there is capacity.*

Kendra Gragg, teacher in Ravenswood City Elementary District, said she realized it was unfair to hold this Board accountable for policies put in place decades ago. However, it is important to recognize the inequity and weight of these policies, and their continued impact today on the Ravenswood community and some of our most vulnerable children.

Kendra Gragg read a letter from Marion Magaña, Special Coordinator at 49er Academy, who attended school in Ravenswood district and the Eastside College Preparatory School in East Palo Alto. Ms. Magaña noted that the East Palo Alto community has been broken. She said this would not be an easy battle but all students needed to be given a fair chance for a future.

Ellen Mouchawar, said she has read the revised AR and said it did not give Ravenswood students *preference*. The open enrollment process will work until capacity is reached, then the open enrollment process is finished and the next step is applying for an adjustment transfer. If there is some priority given to Ravenswood students, the AR did not state that.

Artis asked who determines capacity and what the impact on each school was.

Dr. McNair-Knox, member of non-profit sector of East Palo Alto and former teacher in both Sequoia Union High and Ravenswood City Elementary districts, said she has lived in East Palo Alto since 1965 when the results of desegregation closed down Ravenswood High School. Dr. Knox told Board members that they had the opportunity to right those wrongs by giving preference to Ravenswood students. She stated that the children should not to have to travel to the outskirts of Sequoia district to earn resumes to get them to college, and requested that the students living in East Palo Alto be brought back into the mainstream of education.

Robert Steinentz suggested keeping communities together, and reducing the time students sit on buses. He suggested that changing the transfer policy would be a short-term solution and that the Board consider re-opening an old elementary school.

Dr. Lianides said adjustment transfers can occur at any time during the school year. With this policy change the adjustment transfer process will occur prior to any requests for open enrollment assignments to M-A. Those transfers would be considered by a team comprised of a principal, the director of student services, and superintendent. This team also determines capacity.

Superintendent Lianides reported that a Facility Task Force was in the process of researching whether opening a small magnet school would be beneficial to include in the overall plan to address enrollment growth. The school would hold 300 to 400 students and provide alternative educational opportunities for students. The challenge of building a brand new high school was finding available land near where people live. Capacity is a unique calculation done school-by-school and is related to the students that school is educating; also taken into account are the number of classrooms, staff and categorical funding support.

Trustee Weiner noted that he had talked with Ellen Mouchawar in regard to the administrative regulation under discussion. The Superintendent described that the intent of the policy was if there was capacity the adjustment transfer process would be used first to move students from Ravenswood to M-A, and then move on to applying for open enrollment. Trustee Weiner said he has been working with legal counsel to make these points explicit in the administrative regulation.

Trustee Du Bois said the Board has heard only from involved community members. She met with Amika Guillaume, Principal of Green Oaks/Chavez School in East Palo Alto, and she has concerns sending all of her kids to M-A. Some students need to be split up. It is a very complicated issue. We have not received input from the sources we need to hear from—we are not listening to teachers, and we need to hear more voices.

Superintendent Lianides said he met with staff at three of the four high schools and would meet tomorrow with M-A teachers. He has heard a lot of support for the direction the Board is taking.

Trustee Du Bois noted that many times she has asked to hear from advocates for foster and homeless youth. Some kids can travel. There were issues to solve. In response to a statement by Trustee Du Bois, Menlo-Atherton Principal Matthew Zito said 63 percent of the **Ravenswood** students who start at M-A graduate **from M-A in four years**. In response to a question posed by Trustee Weiner, Trustee Du Bois said she wanted to see the very best for Ravenswood students and cannot make a decision concerning the administrative regulation for a variety of reasons.

Student Trustee Porter said when she asked a friend living in East Palo Alto and attending Carlmont for an opinion concerning the opportunity to attend M-A, the friend said even though she loved Carlmont the idea of attending M-A was much better.

Trustee Sarver advised that making corrections to the language in the administrative regulation (AR) indicating adjustment transfers would take place before open enrollment and changing the words in items 4 and 5 of the AR to *will* as opposed to *may* would do much to clean up the AR for the current school year. Moving forward was critical to ensure that we receive all input and that we get it right. Open enrollment is an agency of choice; stating that some of our students are not equipped for that choice is no reason to limit it. Our responsibility is to bring more opportunities to our students, and this open enrollment policy is intended to help incoming families accelerate their ability to get to the school of their choice. When we get to boundary adjustments there may be less need because we got it right and provided a way to get families to the school that best serves their community.

Trustee Martinez said the Superintendent has done a good job of capturing the comments and thought that changing the word *may* to *will* would strengthen the AR. Dr. Martinez said she appreciated Trustee Sarver's comments concerning the choices before us and the need to work well. She did not agree with the comment concerning poverty and the ability to make decisions, and she noted that there were people on staff to help students with limited choices.

Trustee Weiner said the boundary map highlighted the issue of inequity, which was the result of well-intentioned people decades ago. He was supportive of making a change and wanted to do it in a way that was successful. Making changes to the open enrollment policy was the first step toward aligning Ravenswood with M-A. Input needs to come from families all over the district. Trustee Weiner said he would vote in favor of a revised policy that included the changes in language that had been discussed.

Dr. Lianides said he would bring back Administrative Regulation AR5116.1 with the recommended changes on October 9.

Discussion of Process to Gather Input in Development of Tentative Boundary Map	Superintendent Lianides reported that he would meet with each of the partner district superintendents in October to receive input on a boundary map. A tentative map will be presented to the Board for discussion at the first meeting in November. Upon receiving input from the Board a tentative map will be taken to community meetings to show what is being considered to accommodate increased enrollment in 2015-16. The Facilities Task Force will meet on Friday to discuss the addition of one or two small schools with instructional program(s) around a theme.

Staff anticipates developing a tentative boundary map by January and then going out for a general obligation bond in June to make it all possible.

Jon Reilly, Menlo Park resident, said in the 1980s the community of East Palo Alto was broken up; he understood the need, and the busing situation does not work well. Putting Ravenswood students at M-A did not seem like a long-term solution. Mr. Reilly suggested that the Board listen to public input and not to rush.

John Giambruno, Coordinator of Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) and the Academy teacher at M-A, spoke in support of consolidating the AVID programs and also the Academies programs. From Mr. Giambruno's perspective, merging programs districtwide would strengthen articulation with Ravenswood.

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Travis Katz, Menlo Park resident, said he thought there was agreement that the map did not make sense and busing places a burden on families, but when looking at statistics for kids living in East Palo Alto there was clearly a failing. Mr. Travis asked if performance would worsen if everyone was at one school; he noted the educational failing needs to be considered as we go through this process.

George Portugal, Menlo Park resident, said he had not heard about emphasizing academic excellence and performance. M-A is a high-performing school with a special eco system. Before changes were made careful consideration needs to be given to the impact on M-A's performance. Mr. Portugal advised that drawing boundaries was a difficult task and suggested taking the time to engage a third-party consulting firm.

Larry Kelmar, Menlo Park resident and parent of two students at La Entrada, said it was very confusing for parents to understand the link between the administrative regulation and boundaries. He expressed concern about the speed at which the changes might happen and suggested that thought be given to the secondary issues.

Heidrun Utz asked if the changes would affect all grades at the same time and if education would suffer in the interim.

Approval of Revised AR5116.1, Intradistrict Open Enrollment and Adjustment Transfers

Superintendent Lianides said the revised Administrative Regulation AR5116.1, Intradistrict Open Enrollment and Adjustment Transfers, reflects the direction the Board gave to staff in June following the six community input meetings held in May. Approval of this policy is presented for action as an interim step in the process to address future boundary changes. Policy AR5116.1 will grant a greater number of adjustment transfers to Menlo-Atherton (M-A) High School from

Ravenswood City Elementary District in East Palo Alto, and provide more students residing in West San Carlos the opportunity to go to Carlmont High School.

Anais Zamora, M-A graduate, said she wanted more students from East Palo Alto to have the opportunity to go to M-A rather than Carlmont because of its closer proximity to where they live. Her brother attends Carlmont, and it would be better for him to go to M-A because her parents do not have time to transport him to Belmont.

Mareelina Hernandez, representing Ravenswood parents, said two of her sons had attended M-A, and another son is enrolled at Carlmont. Her experiences between Carlmont and M-A were quite different. M-A is within walking distance of her home, and she was an involved mother at school; however, Carlmont is too far away and she has never been able to go there.

Evelyn Payan, representing students of the Ravenswood school district, said she moved here in her freshmen year and ended up attending East Palo Alto Charter High School. She is happy there but would have rather gone to M-A where she could take advantage of the many options available to students. Ms. Payan said she supported AR5116.1.

Manuela Ramos said she was the mother of many children some of whom attended Eastside College Preparatory School in East Palo Alto. Her daughter got the chance to attend M-A, and she is now studying to be a doctor. We should have the choice of what school we go to because our children are the future. There should be extra-curricular activities offered on campus to avoid situations involving drugs and alcohol. Mrs. Ramos said her community should not to be separated due to financial circumstances; we work hard, and try to move on to higher education.

Nubia Barajas, Ravenswood district parent, said her daughter was getting a good education, and she had great faith in Superintendent Dr. Gloria Hernandez. Ravenswood has been neglected for many decades and the kids she sees in her daughter's class are the future. It is very important for students to have access to Menlo-Atherton, which is not far from East Palo Alto. It is not a good idea for students to have to take a bus to Carlmont. Mrs. Barajas asked the Board to consider having Ravenswood students attend a high school that is closer to home.

Dr. Gloria Hernandez, Superintendent of Ravenswood City Elementary District, commented that the revision to Administrative Regulation AR5116.1 (page 4) hugely impacted Ravenswood district. She said we are supportive of the policy, and it is a move in the right direction. Dr. Hernandez said she appreciated the courage and steadfastness of the SUHSD Board of Trustees; there were many constituencies to serve, and it was difficult, but the Board was doing the right thing.

Avani Patel, Costaño School/49er Academy and an advocate for the Ravenswood community, said many people wanted to be here tonight and there was an entire community behind her. She said approving this policy was the first step in the right direction. Even though she did not like to see exceptions to policies, making these exceptions was the right thing to do. She urged the Board to think about equity—not equality. Ms. Patel said she was glad to be working together in a positive direction.

Larry Kelmar, Las Lomitas parent, said he had concerns about the speed at which the Board was moving on making changes to a boundary system that was set 30 years ago. He had helped put in place a strategic plan for Las Lomitas Elementary District, which was a six-month process. The Board needs to ask what are we looking to do and how are we going to measure it afterward. With no plan there is nothing to guide you. The Sequoia district goals were drafted in 1997, and certainly education has changed in the last 15 years. When implementing a strategic plan, each school is different and has different priorities for measuring student success in the 21st century. Mr. Kelmar recommended reconsidering open enrollment by first putting a strategic plan in place.

Colleen McDonough, Las Lomitas parent, said the issue is keeping our community together. Going forward, it is clear M-A is the strongest choice. She believed there needs to be a strategic plan in place before these decisions are made.

Kendra Gragg, Teacher in Ravenswood City Elementary District, said we need to move forward; our children embrace the richness of the Ravenswood community.

Trustee Weiner said his sense was the question of strategic planning vs. dealing with enrollment policy is comparing "apples and oranges," and in going forward revising AR5116.1 would not change M-A. There are models in place to educate all children, and the district is well-prepared. The question whether we should do strategic planning deserves consideration in its own right, but it is independent from the question whether to make this change in open enrollment and move in the direction to improve a historical inequity. Trustee Weiner said he had confidence in the community that this will not become an issue. There will be three partner school districts that will be aligned with Menlo-Atherton High School, and this going to be a cooperative arrangement. Trustee Weiner said he was in support of approving AR5116.1.

Trustee Du Bois said she was concerned about Ravenswood, and it was important to do this right. The kids deserve to have a plan before we make this move. M-A is a fantastic school, but she would like to see more blending of communities and a more integrated high school. Trustee Du Bois said she had concerns about it being a tracked school. She said she had a huge concern solving this through open enrollment and choice, and that the most vulnerable students may lose in a system of choice. Trustee Du Bois said she hoped that every kid would end up in the right place and could be well-served. She read sentences from Diane Ravitch's book, *Reign of Error . . .,* and the fact that choice feeds into competition. Trustee Du Bois suggested that until a strategic plan was developed, an interim solution would be to let as many kids into M-A which wanted to go there. Trustee Du Bois said she would vote "no" to revise Administrative Regulation AR 5116.1, Intradistrict Open Enrollment and Adjustment Transfers.

Trustee Sarver said he was in agreement with Trustee Weiner's comments. We have a two-phased approach, and the boundary mapping issue is a strategic long-term process. We have heard from the community and board members that we cannot wait until the long term solution is completed. We have heard how long overdue this is to give students access to their neighborhood high school. That is why we have to put in place a policy to provide Ravenswood students with more access to M-A. With the help of Dr. Hernandez, ensuring that all voices are heard, it is time to begin extending the partnership between M-A and Ravenswood communities and building up student expectations and engagement that will improve outcomes. That is why the Board can count on my "yes" vote to revise Administrative Regulation AR5116.1.

Trustee Martinez said she concurred with Trustee Weiner and was proud of the process used. As a Board member since 1999, she participated in development of two strategic plans with two superintendents. She wanted to say how proud she was of the Board and its responsiveness to the comments we have heard from the Ravenswood community as well as other communities. Dr. Martinez said she was excited about revising the open enrollment policy. She noted, from first-hand experience, that the district has moved away from tracking; school staffs have real data and know where students can be successful. We allow kids to participate fully in the educational program offerings. We should send letters and inform the community of the actions we are taking here tonight. Trustee Martinez said we have looked carefully at the concerns expressed and have tried to positively resolve them. By hiring the best teachers and the best leadership we will keep our high schools in the top performing tier.

Student Trustee Porter said the option of having the choice will be valued by the students, and she was in favor of voting "yes" to revise Administrative Regulation AR5116.1.

President Thomsen said he believed the Board would be working on a strategic plan in the new year. He advised the Board should not wait to take action to fix a long-term inequity, and this administrative regulation moves us closer. The majority of comments heard were to "keep our community together," and these were from the communities of Menlo Park, Las Lomitas, and Ravenswood. President Thomsen noted even though the policy was not perfect, he would support it as a step toward moving forward.

On a motion by Trustee Martinez, seconded by Trustee Weiner, the Board of Trustees approved the revised Administrative Regulation AR5116.1, Intradistrict Open Enrollment and Adjustment Transfers by a vote of four to one.