

BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING
2:00 p.m. – Work Session – Yeager Room
Thursday, December 7, 2023

MINUTES

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Buncombe County Board of Education met in a special called work session on December 7, 2023, at 2:00 p.m. in the Yeager Room located at 175 Bingham Road, Asheville, North Carolina, when the following business was transacted.

The following Board members were present:

Ann Franklin, Madam Chair
Peggy Buchanan, Member
Rob Elliot, Member
Judy Lewis, Member

Kim Plemmons, Member
Amanda Simpkins, Member
Amy Churchill, Vice-Chair

Staff present: Dr. Rob Jackson, Superintendent; Dr. Jennifer Reed, Associate Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction; Joseph Hough, Assistant Superintendent Auxiliary Services; Dr. Jamie Johnson, Assistant Superintendent of Educational Equity & Student Support; Dr. Stacia Harris, Communications Director; Dean Shatley, Attorney; and Kim Matthews, Executive Administrative Assistant

Approval of Agenda – Madam Chair, Ann Franklin

Mr. Elliot made a motion to approve the agenda and Ms. Plemmons seconded the motion – the motion was approved unanimously 6/0. Ms. Churchill arrived a few minutes late.

- Discussion of BCS' Redrawing of Electoral Districts
Adam Mitchell, Tharrington Smith, LLP
Blake Esselstyn, Mapfigure Consulting

Mr. Mitchell began by reviewing information from the previous work session that pertained to the following: redistricting principals; the challenges facing BCS in redrawing electoral districts; and population scenarios for electoral districts.

Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Esselstyn then shared the priority criteria that the Board stated they would like to use in considering electoral districts. These were as follows:

High Priority Criteria to Inform Drafting of Plans

- **High School Enrollment Districts**
 - Prioritizing drawing six electoral districts that match the current six high school enrollment districts to the extent possible. (The eponymous high school campuses themselves would also be kept in separate districts.)
- **Incumbents**
 - Drawing districts so that no two incumbents are placed in the same electoral district.
- **Communities of Interest**
 - Keeping communities of interest whole to the extent practicable. A “community of interest” is a group of people with a common interest, such as social, cultural, racial, ethnic, and economic interests common to the population of the area.
 - Specifically consider elementary school attendance zones and the Shiloh community
- **Pie Wedge Configuration** (particular to the BCS situation)
 - Preserving the arrangement where each district radiates from the center, touching the ACS Administrative Unit, to the outer Buncombe County boundary. With this layout each electoral district would border two other BCS electoral districts—and no more.

Low Priority Criteria to Inform Drafting of Plans

- **Municipal Boundaries**
 - Drawing districts that avoid splitting municipalities into multiple electoral districts to the extent practicable.
- **Compactness**
 - Drawing districts that are “compact.” There is no official definition, however, of a compact district and many people instinctively rely on the “I know it when I see it” test. In general, a compact district has a more regular shape, as opposed to a more convoluted one.
- **Major Physical Features as Boundaries**
 - Prioritizing using major roads, railroads, waterways, and other similar visible features as district boundaries as opposed to administrative boundaries that aren't visible on the ground.

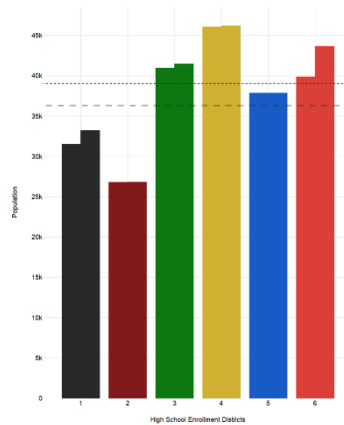
1647

Work Session Minutes – December 7, 2023

- **Keeping Precincts Whole**
 - Drawing districts that minimize the splitting of voting precincts. This “best practice” is sometimes prioritized as it tends to decrease voter confusion and simplify election administration by having fewer ballot styles at individual voting locations.
- **Post-Census Development**
 - Weighting the population of various districts based on known growth patterns. For example, in a known high-growth area, a district could be drawn towards the lower end of the acceptable deviation range. Likewise, a lower-growth district could be drawn towards the higher end of the acceptable deviation range. The purpose of this practice is to try to use current information and projections in an effort to keep the districts within the acceptable deviation range until the next census. This is not required by law and most redistricting plans do not stay in balance over a ten-year census period.
 - This generally calls for us to work with school system or county planning staff to learn about growth patterns and projections.
- **Contiguity**
 - Ensuring contiguity, in other words, keeping all parts of a district connected to each other, is a fairly standard requirement for many redistricting processes. In this instance, however, the jurisdiction already contains non-contiguous regions—meaning that districts will unavoidably have disconnected parts. That said, whether the new districts introduce any *new* non-contiguous situations could be specified as a principle for the process.

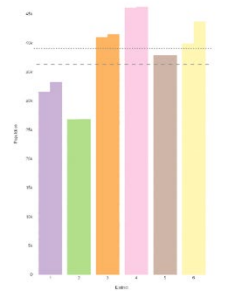
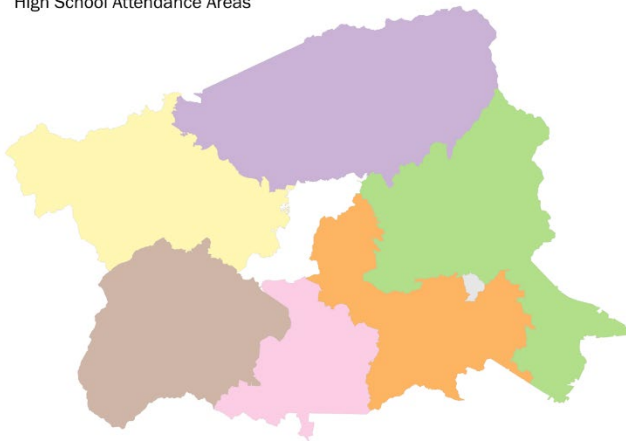
Next, Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Esselstyn shared several maps that showed the following information.

Population Deviation with Current Districts



High School Attendance Areas

High School Attendance Areas

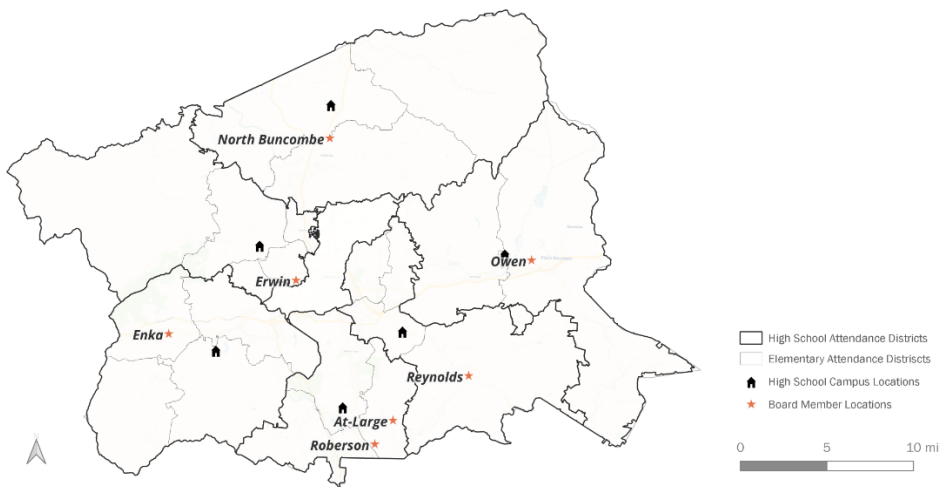


Work Session Minutes – December 7, 2023

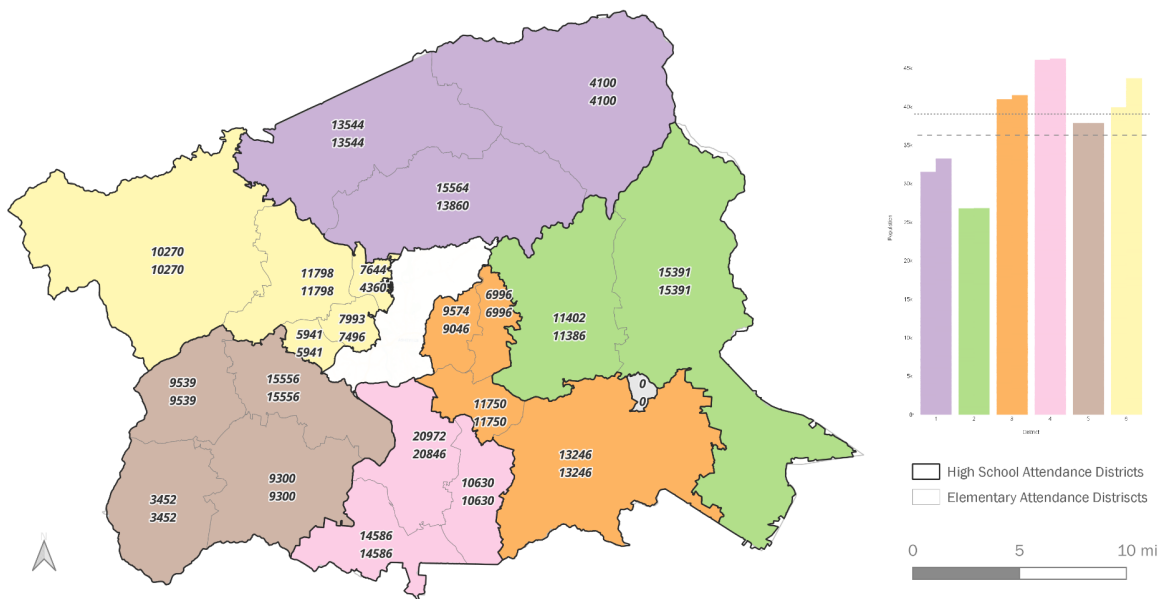
Several topography maps were used to show the characteristics of the district attendance lines.



The current attendance district lines with the high school campus locations and incumbent residence locations marked were displayed as point of references for option considerations.



The high school district attendance shaded map that contained the elementary attendance districts with the population of each was shown. Mr. Esselstyn noted that the elementary attendance districts closest to the Asheville City Schools' district have a significant maximum and minimum difference.

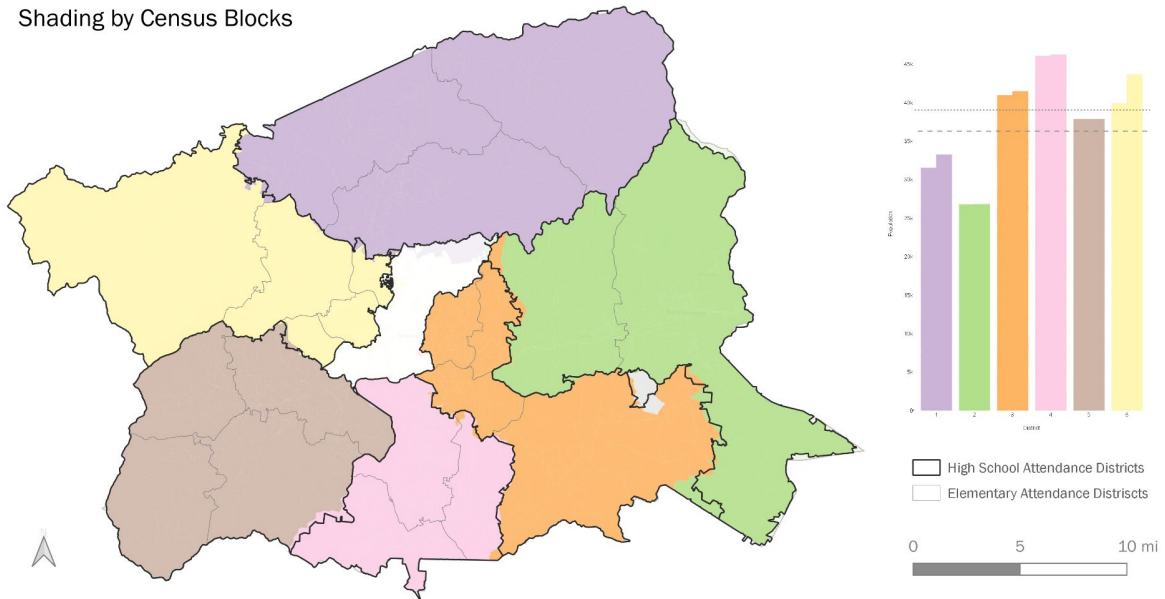


1649

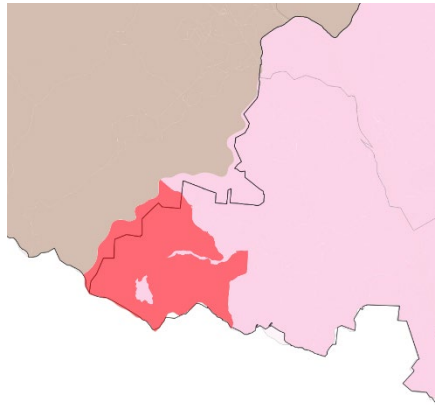
Work Session Minutes – December 7, 2023

Maps containing shading by census blocks were used to show where the overlap in census blocks between two attendance districts.

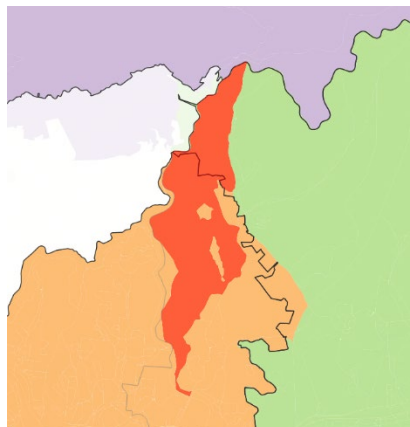
Shading by Census Blocks



Detailed area of the census block overlap in the Enka and Roberson attendance districts.



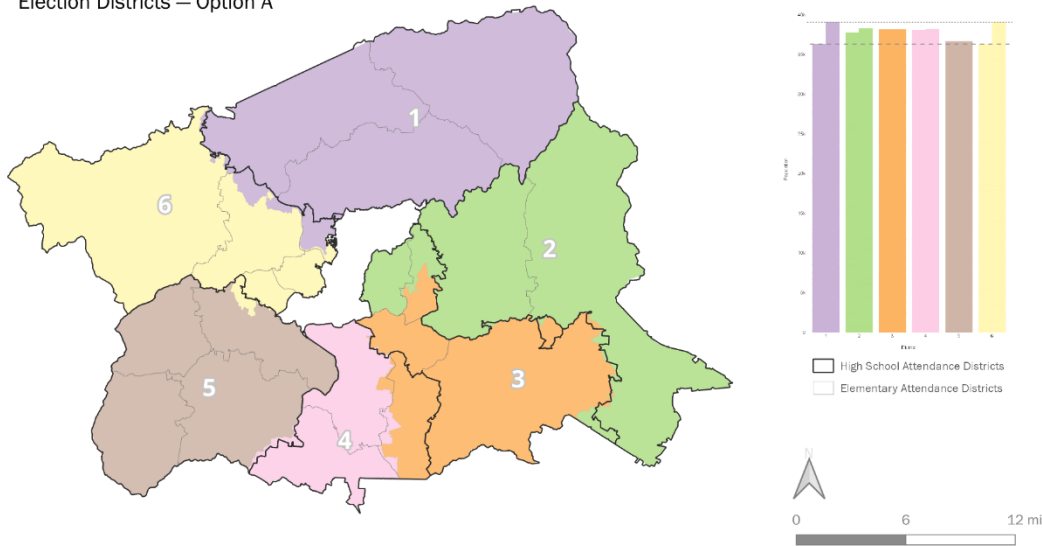
Detailed area of the census block overlap in the Reynolds and Owen attendance districts.



Work Session Minutes – December 7, 2023

Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Esselstyn then presented the potential electoral district options for the Board’s consideration.

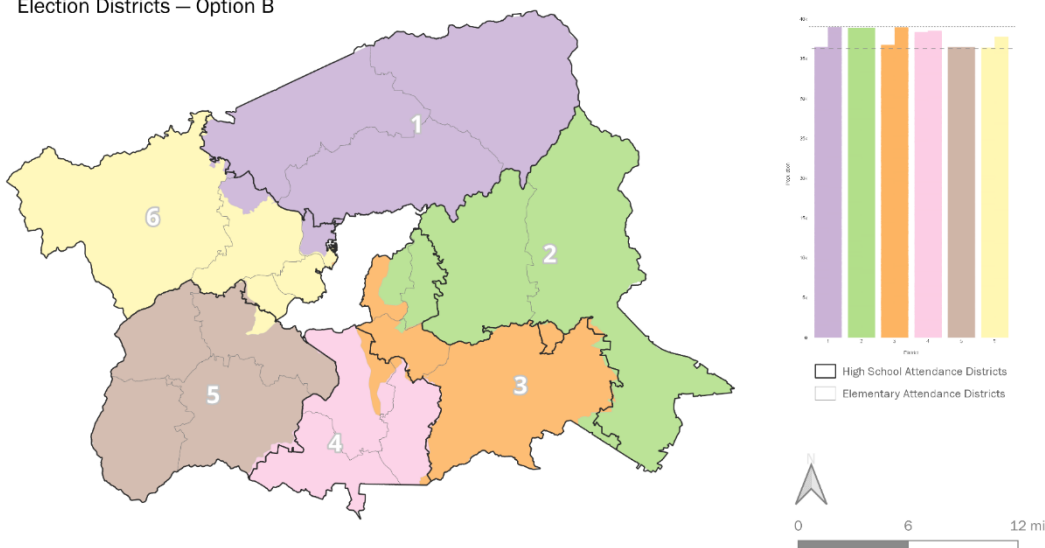
Election Districts – Option A



Key Elements of Option A

- No additional non-contiguities introduced.
- A substantial portion of Woodfin Elementary district shifts into District 1; pieces of West Buncombe Elementary district shift similarly (some boundaries convoluted)
- Haw Creek Elementary district (wholly) shifted into District 2, as are northern parts of Bell Elementary district.
- Most of Glen Arden Elementary district shifts to District 3
- Much of Starnes Cove area shifts from Sand Hill Venable Elementary district into District 6
- Essentially zero “wobble room” for Districts 1, 5, and 6 because minimum and maximum population scenarios are right at the limits for deviation.

Election Districts – Option B



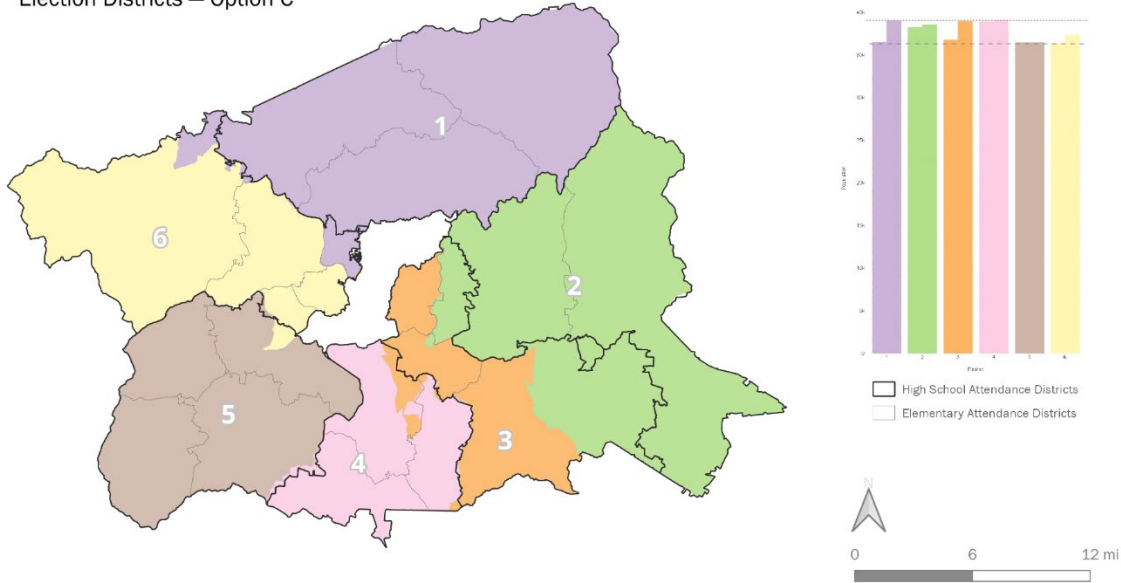
Key Elements of Option B

- One additional non-contiguity introduced: portions of two split blocks on UNC Asheville campus (student population) assigned to District 3
- The portion of Woodfin Elementary shifting into District 1 has cleaner division (along Lakeshore Drive), as does the similarly shifting piece of West Buncombe Elementary
- Bell Elementary district (wholly) shifted into District 2, as are Haw Creek neighborhood parts of Haw Creek Elementary district.
- Shiloh neighborhood made whole by shifting western parts into District 3, along with other neighborhoods in Estes district east of Hendersonville Road
- Area from Sand Hill Venable Elementary district shifting into District 6 is closer to Patton Avenue/Smokey Park Highway, between Sulphur Springs and Acton
- Slight additional “wobble room” for Districts 1, 5, and 6 because uncertainty shared with District 3

1651

Work Session Minutes – December 7, 2023

Election Districts – Option C



Key Elements of Option C

- Two additional non-contiguities introduced: UNC Asheville (like Option B) as well as Elk Mountain Scenic Highway roadway portions.
- Almost all of Woodfin Elementary shifts into District 1, along with a small portion of Leicester Elementary
- Bell Elementary district (wholly) shifted into District 2, along with eastern half of Fairview Elementary district.
- Shiloh neighborhood made whole by shifting western parts into District 3, along with other neighborhoods in Estes district mostly east of Sweeten Creek Road
- Area from Sand Hill Venable Elementary district shifting into District 6 is closer to Patton Avenue/Smokey Park Highway, between Sulphur Springs and Acton
- The most additional “wiggle room” for Districts 1, 5, and 6 because uncertainty shared with both District 2 and District 3

Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Esselstyn did note that there is potential to mix and match the options if the Board would like to consider these. The potential is shown in the following map.

(Mostly) Discrete “Systems” — Possible Potential for Mix and Match



A link to an Interactive Map was also given so that the Board and community would be able to go online to compare options.

The Interactive Map:

<https://felt.com/map/Buncombe-County-Board-of-Education-Draft-Election-District-Options-Dec-23-S8UsRKpJT3iRw4AFuRE1qD?loc=35.6203,-82.5316,11.43z&share=1>

This is an online tool that you and members of the public can use to compare and contract plans, with the ability to zoom into the street level.

Work Session Minutes – December 7, 2023

The Board was given an outline of a possible next steps to take and a timeline to follow.

- Today—present three alternative plans to the Board based on the constraints of the split block uncertainty and the criteria provided by the Board at previous meeting.
 - Should any plans be eliminated? Are any additional plans needed?
 - Make determinations about feedback from the public.
 - Timing/nature of public hearing.
 - Other methods to gather input—web landing page with submission form, posting paper maps with comment cards, etc.
- January/and or February Meeting (or special meeting)—continue discussion and possible public hearing.
- February or March Meeting—consider resolution adopting preferred plan.
- Following adoption—we will work with the Board of Elections to export the data they need to update their voter information.

The Board then discussed their concerns with the electoral redistricting process. Ms. Simpkins would like to see the percentage change in population sizes for electoral districts. Stating that she is concerned that some areas will be disproportionately impacted. Ms. Churchill also expressed concern over the options that they are faced with. Mr. Mitchell, Mr. Esselstyn and Mr. Shatley answered questions from the Board concerning public input, community meetings and what would that look like. Several Board members expressed a desire to take time to review the options given today and come back in January to discuss. The Board asked that an online page on the BCS website be posted so that the public can examine the potential options and give their feedback for the Board's consideration. The Board agreed that another work session was needed preceding the January 11, 2024 meeting and that they would hold a public forum in February to be followed by the Board's vote to choose an option in March or April 2024.

Closing Comments

The Board expressed the appreciation to Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Esselstyn for being thorough and explaining the details and options of electoral redistricting.

Adjournment

Ms. Lewis made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:50 p.m. and Ms. Simpkins seconded the motion – the motion was approved unanimously.

Rob Jackson, Superintendent &
Ex Officio Secretary

Ann B. Franklin, Madam Chair

Minutes for Approval: January 11, 2024
klm