

Minneapolis Changing School Options and Barton School Questions and Answers May 27, 2009

What exactly has prompted the idea of moving Barton's program to another building?

Since 1981, two neighborhoods, East Harriet Farmstead and King Field comprise the MPS "F2" open attendance area, meaning they do not have a designated community school available to them. There are 11 other open areas in the city. Instead, these families have a wide array of choices, including magnets and other community schools. Just over half of the children in these two neighborhoods attend community schools, and just fewer than half attend magnets. Approximately one quarter (27%) of the children in East Harriet and King Field attend Barton, and another 36% attend Lake Harriet and Burroughs. The Barton building is located in the East Harriet neighborhood. There is no school building in the King Field neighborhood. Agassiz School, once located at 38th and Garfield, was so badly damaged in the 1981 tornado that it was demolished. At that time, there weren't significant numbers of children in the area and building closures were occurring.

In February 2009, the Minneapolis Public Schools announced a comprehensive plan to create financial sustainability and build a new foundation for academic success. The number of magnet offerings will be reduced and about 7,500 children from 12 open areas will be assigned a designated community school. Families in "open areas" have had a "three choice guarantee" for the last 8-9 years, as long as they choose one magnet and two community schools, and turn their choice card in on time. While this worked well at first, it no longer does. Burroughs and Lake Harriet Community Schools can no longer accommodate the number of requests from East Harriet and King Field in addition to those from to their own attendance area. Because Barton's attendance area is large due to its magnet status, and it is highly requested, all requests from the immediate neighborhood cannot be accommodated. As a result, approximately 30 families did not receive their top three choices for this school year, and some are without one of their top three for the 2009-10 school year.

Some families in King Field and East Harriet wanted to convert the Barton building into a K-8 community school for their neighborhoods. Discovering that this proposal did not receive support due to the lack of racial and economic diversity in these two neighborhoods, the group began to explore the idea of adding the Lyndale school building, and the Lyndale neighborhood, into a dual campus proposal that might meet the district's diversity goals. As a result of this proposal, Barton Open would need to move from its existing location into another building in order to create a dual campus K-8 community school at 34th and Grand (Lyndale grades K-3) and 43rd and Colfax (grades 4-8), housing 1,110-1,400 students. Proposals for Barton Open's new location have included Ramsey, Jefferson, Emerson, and Folwell.

What is happening right now?

With input from the community, school district administrators drew up a plan for the entire city and presented it to the School Board on April 28. Included in the district's goals and core values were choice, diversity, equity, financial stewardship and sustainability. The plan objectives include the following themes: get closer to home, reduce but maintain choice, ensure adequate program size, maintain some flexibility, and uphold our commitment to the North Side Initiative.

Among its many district-wide recommendations, the plan included leaving Barton Open where it is and assigning the East Harriet and King Field neighborhoods to the Lyndale Community School. It recommended "grandfathering" current students in their existing community schools, provided families

can provide transportation, and using “out of area sibling preference” for future siblings. (This gives younger children some preference in attending the schools their older siblings currently attend.)

At its May 5 work session, the School Board indicated there was not sufficient support for the administration's recommendations and wanted further study. Among the proposals suggested for further work was the recommendation designating Lyndale as the community school for the East Harriet and King Field neighborhoods. As many as five Board members stated that assigning Lyndale as the community school for East Harriet and King Field was not “sustainable”, citing possible lack of physical capacity, and questioning whether adding to the building would be a viable solution for possible overcrowding. School Board members asked administrators to take a more in-depth look at the K-8 dual campus proposal developed by a group of parents in East Harriet and King Field as an alternative to the MPS staff recommendation, and to consider moving Barton Open to the Ramsey school facility at 49th and Nicollet.

Lyndale School’s PTO has written an impassioned argument against the K-8 dual campus idea, and the Barton, Lyndale and Ramsey school communities, together, developed another proposal suggesting Ramsey become a community school with a fine arts theme. By so doing, East Harriet and King Field families could choose either Lyndale (K-5) or Ramsey (K-8). Each of these documents appears on the bartonopen.org website, on the right hand side.

What is the timeline for decisions being made that might affect Barton?

A joint statement by Dr. Green, MPS Superintendent, and Tom Madden, Chairman of the School Board, was issued May 21. MPS will take approximately six weeks, until the end of June, to develop a comprehensive plan for public presentation that will be crafted with the collaboration of the Board of Directors. Public comment sessions will occur again in September 2009, as well as public hearings about the proposed building closures, as required by law.

How would a move to a new location affect Barton Open?

Any move and change in location for a school brings disruption and uncertainty. A shift in teachers, staff and families is likely to occur. The building facility will need to be adapted over time. New community connections will need to be established. Barton will have to gain back the confidence of parents and the community. It is unknown what changes the Barton Open program will undergo if it is required to move to a new location. It is clear that Minneapolis supports magnet schools and that Barton Open is a successful and sustainable school community in its current location. The critical question is what benefits will such a move bring to the district as a whole that will outweigh the cost and disruption for families and staff, and the potential risk to the sustainability of open, progressive education in MPS?

There are currently over 900 students who attend Ramsey. Barton's current population is 750. It is unknown at this time how a relocation of the Barton program to Ramsey would affect Ramsey students and staff. Assuming all the families move with the Open program to Ramsey, except half of the current F2 families, Barton might have 600-650 students in a building that has held closer to 1,000 in the last 6 years. MPS administration could see it as convenient to ask Barton to absorb ELL (300) and autism (50) students already in the building, or to integrate existing Fine Arts magnet students into the Open program. Additional staff would need to be hired if the program size increased, and the staff already delivering the Ramsey Fine Arts program might be interested in positions. “Realignment” laws might begin to take effect depending upon the MFT (Minneapolis Federation of Teachers) contract that is currently being negotiated. Some Fine Arts students and staff could remain, and the Open program

could be co-located in the Ramsey building with the remnants of a Fine Arts magnet program.

The implications of these changes are enormous for Barton's open magnet program. An understanding and belief in the open program by families and staff is critical to its viability. A large influx of students in older grades or staff who are not committed to the open program will weaken the program. Furthermore, the existing Barton building has been adapted over time with the open philosophy in mind. The commons area was designed so that our entire student body can come together and engage, as this is a cornerstone of the open philosophy. Our classrooms accommodate small group learning and class meetings. We would have to regroup to deal with the building loss.

How has Barton responded to the district's goals and the need for change? Can we do more?

Barton has suggested that we can best support the district in meeting its goals by increasing the number of students in our ELL program, increasing the number of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch through student placement modifications, and giving “proximity placement” to a certain number of students who would move up on the wait list after lottery assignment. MPS placement and transportation staff would determine the geographic area of this zone that would have this priority, but it probably would not include addresses east of Lyndale due to the busy street crossing policy. These changes would increase racial and economic diversity at Barton. We continue to explore other ways Barton and the district can work together to reach district goals.

What will happen to Ramsey in any scenario?

The district has been unclear about what might happen to Ramsey and/or its student population. It currently is a fine arts themed magnet with over 900 students. About 300 students are Hispanic ELL students who live south of I-94/394. There is also a citywide autism program of 50+ students. Although once a very strong Fine Arts program, the number of students who have chosen Ramsey for Fine Arts has decreased, but those remaining are interested in maintaining a Fine Arts focus, or exploring the option of finding another space to create a Fine Arts program in Minneapolis.

Does the district have examples of schools that have moved “intact” (with the principal and staff) to another building, and if so, how have the moves affected those schools in the short-run and long-run?

One example that is cited frequently is Marcy Open School. Here is an excerpt from letter from a Marcy parent posted on the MPS parent forum that speaks to Marcy’s moves and reflects the consensus views of a number of Marcy staff and families:

- Marcy began in the "old Marcy building" (now a small park). After the building sprung a roof leak and was non-compliant with the fire code, Marcy was moved (intact) into the Holmes School.
- The Holmes School was on the site where Marcy is now located. That building was closed in 1982, and Marcy moved into the Tuttle building. This arrangement compromised the program.
- Marcy's Open program was diminished and struggled to survive. There was a sense that if Marcy had also been expected to increase to a K-8 at that time, it would have destroyed the program.
- Marcy got its own new building at the present site and increased from a K-6 to a K-8.
- Marcy has been diminished over time by principal and teacher turnover. Teachers and principals have been assigned to the Marcy program who, though sympathetic to the program, have not necessarily been trained Open educators.
- Marcy educators and program developers engaged during these moves believe that while each move had its own struggle, the move to the Tuttle building, of all the moves, carried the greatest risk and temporarily crippled the program.
- No move brings guarantees. There's not a guarantee that the Barton principal, one of our district's best resources on Open education, will stay in our district. Or, that the Barton families will buy into a move that

they feel is being imposed by a group that does not have their best interests in mind.

Another move that isn't mentioned as much is the Open program that moved from Jefferson to Windom, experienced decline, and will be phased out at the end of the 2010-11 school year.

Some advocates for moving Barton refer to Burroughs "move". Burroughs was slated for remodeling, and during the time when Burroughs was temporarily relocated for the remodeling, it was discovered that the structural challenges were so great that it had to be razed and rebuilt. After opening its new facility, all the families from the temporary facilities returned to the new building, and enrollment has increased ever since. Burroughs also changed from its magnet "fundamental program" to a "community school" under Carol Johnson's tenure.

Ramsey Fine Arts moved from Longfellow just over 15 years ago because it had outgrown the building. The program continued to grow and thrive until early in this decade, when budget cuts became severe, and the mass migration of students to charters and "Choice Is Yours" programs occurred. Ramsey now struggles to maintain its integrity in Fine Arts, while providing ELL services for about 300 students bused there, in addition to a citywide autism program. There still is a core group of staff and parents committed to Fine Arts, but its cohort is smaller in size than the building capacity. As a result, the magnet status of Ramsey as of April 28 was listed as "TBD", based on a community engagement process.

Will my child be unable to attend Barton if the attendance boundaries are redrawn?

The working assumption now is that families will be "grandfathered" into their existing schools, and siblings will be granted admittance if there is room through "out of area sibling preference". The transportation boundaries might change, and some families may need to provide their own transportation if they continue with the Open program. The 90 or so students who currently live on the east side of 35W in the G1, G2, G3, and G4 attendance areas may or may not be offered a bus (Bryant, Central, Powderhorn, Bancroft neighborhoods), whether the Open program remains at Barton or is moved to Ramsey.

What should Barton families do to make our voices heard? What messages should we stress?

We want what is best for the district as a whole, and for Barton. Work hard to use proactive, collaborative, problem-solving language. We want to be part of the solution. Please be mindful of the magnitude of the challenges our district faces, and the feelings of other families who may have less choice and fewer opportunities than we enjoy in this area of the city. Write letters to school board members and school district administrators. Post comments on the Minneapolis Parents Forum on Yahoo (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/MPS_ParentsForum/), where a thoughtful conversation is going on regarding our situation. If you are interested in speaking with Minneapolis Public School officials, sign up with Julia Mullin (juliaemmett@usiwireless.com) to meet in small groups with school board members and district administrators. Talk to people and spread your ideas. Tell them about your experience at Barton and what a move might mean.

School board member contacts:

Carla Bates, carla.bates@mpls.k12.mn.us	612.964.0310
Pam Costain, pam.costain@mpls.k12.mn.us	612.668.0638
Jill Davis, jill.davis@mpls.k12.us	612.310.0199

Lydia Lee, lydia.lee@mpls.k12.mn.us 612.668.0633
Tom Madden, tom.madden@mpls.k12.mn.us 612.668.0631
Chris Stewart, chris.stewart@mpls.k12.mn.us 612.668.0639
T Williams, t.Williams@mpls.k12.mn.us 612.668.0629

School Board phone number: 612.668.0197

Changing School Options MPS Planning team:

William Green, Superintendent, bill.green@mpls.k12.mn.us, 612-668-0200
Jackie Turner, Director, Comm. Relations & Student Placement, jackie.Turner@mpls.k12.mn.us, 612-668-1828
Jill Stever-Zeitlin, Special Advisor to the Superintendent, Jill.Stever-Zeitlin@mpls.k12.mn.us, 612-668-0180
Steve Liss, Chief of Policy & Operations, Steven.Liss@mpls.k12.mn.us, 612-668-0129
Bernadeia Johnson, Deputy Superintendent, Bernadeia.Johnson@mpls.k12.mn.us, 612-668-0640

Where should I go for information in the future?

- { HYPERLINK "http://www.mpls.k12.mn.us/Changing_School_Options_Recommendations.html" }
- { HYPERLINK "http://www.bartonopen.org/" } Sign up for our email distribution: http://barton.mpls.k12.mn.us/Barton_Bugle.html. If you already get Bugle mailings, you will need to update your profile to subscribe to our summer mailing list for supplemental information about Changing School Options. We are putting together a special summer list to address these issues and to inform our parents in the event of any major announcements or information you may want to review for possible action, including actions we may suggest over the six week period prior to the Board presentation.
- Be sure you include a telephone number on the Bugle page of the website, as we will also implement a phone tree system for urgent notifications, or to reach our families without email over the summer months.
- Coffee time on Wednesday mornings at 7:30am at Java Jack's until the end of the school year.
- A Yahoo discussion group has been established and will be linked from the bartonopen.org site as soon as it is operational. Email { HYPERLINK "bartonmoderator@gmail.com" } for information about this group starting June 1, 2009. A blog may also be established in conjunction with or in addition to the Yahoo group.
- Please watch for backpack notifications through June 9. After June 9, communication will be made via e-news (preferred) and phone tree if you have no email access.

Additional Documents in Progress:

The history of Clara Barton Open School at its current location
Unintended consequences, considerations, and oversights in the dual campus Lyndale/Barton K8 community school proposal.