

14 May 2009

Dear Board Members and Dr. Green,

The Lyndale School PTO has been thinking closely about the solution to the F2 Open Area problem. We are aware of the K-8 Lyndale/Barton proposal, although no one at Lyndale was asked to help generate that proposal. We received it after it was created, and have needed time to think about it and formulate our response. This letter details why we don't believe that to be a good solution for Lyndale School and the surrounding communities.

Large Number of Students Affected/Lyndale Marginalized The Lyndale/Barton K-8 plan requires Lyndale to be split, all of Barton Open to move to Ramsey, and all of Ramsey's students to be moved elsewhere. This affects over 2000 students. Lyndale's current 408 students, many of them already at-risk, would be deeply affected, as would Barton's 750 and Ramsey's 912. Over 2000 students would be impacted so that 750 F2 students could get a community school with which their parents are comfortable. They certainly are not comfortable with Lyndale now. There is over a decade's worth of data that proves that F2 parents do not embrace the school. Moreover, while Lyndale is included in the plan, it is also marginalized. Our existing 408 students become an instant minority in a Lyndale/Barton K-8 school. If F2 parents haven't wanted their students to be a minority in our school, why is it OK for our students to be made a minority in this new school plan? We see no benefit to Lyndale's students in this plan, only risk.

Academic Risk The new building for the new K-8 program would have to start from scratch, assuming that the Barton Open program is moved intact. New teachers would have to be hired, ones who haven't worked as a team, haven't used Lyndale's best practices for our existing population, and who may not have experience managing 5-6 levels of achievement in each classroom. (That's what it takes to teach kids of all levels of ability, as happens at Lyndale, and it is not an easy skill set to find.) Plus, 2 very different populations would be placed together, without an opportunity for organic growth, which would have allowed us to learn to accommodate each other. Realistically, it would take about 5 years for the staff to "gel", to operate at their highest level of ability, helping our kids to their best. That is too much risk for Lyndale's parents to accept. And frankly, given F2 parents' past focus on test scores and clear concerns about joining Lyndale, 3-4 years of possibly decreased test scores might turn them all off the experiment. Would the district really attract 1300 children in this risky situation? How many years will it truly take to fill the 2 schools, and how much will that cost the district, both in economic terms and in terms of parental trust and acceptance?

Programs and Pathways Another concern with a dual campus structure is that every one of the programs that we have at Lyndale would have to be duplicated at the other campus. Our Somali program, ELL, Autism, CLASS, and other Special Education would all have to continue at the 2nd building, as would our enriching Core Knowledge curriculum. This is the only way to provide an appropriate pathway for Lyndale's children. In addition, no program our children currently feed into for middle school could close. The current pathways we follow attract more students than just Lyndale's. For example, many of our Somali children currently go to Sanford Middle School. The Sanford program couldn't close, because several other schools feed into it besides Lyndale. So, the program would have to be replicated at the new building without the cost savings of closing it somewhere else. This adds an entirely new layer of cost, complexity, and risk to the endeavor.

K-5 vs. K-8 Lyndale parents prefer to send their children to a K-5 school. They overwhelmingly do not want to send their children to a K-8. For many this is a cultural issue, not just a parental choice. Our parents have chosen to send their children to a school that focuses on the elementary years alone, knowing that they will need to change schools for grades 6-8. Our parents feel there is a benefit to separating the youngest children from the “big kids”. They also like the different choices they are able to exercise for middle school. Time and again (some families for nearly 20 years), Lyndale parents have chosen to send their children to one of the highest quality K-5 schools in Area C (see chart, page 4). We want to remain a K-5.

Proposed Alternate Solution Lyndale School is a successful, high-quality school with over 400 students. We would like to grow and to become a more diverse community than what we are today. We do not want that, though, at the expense of everything we’ve created. To us, the Lyndale/Barton K-8 plan is a torturous solution to the problem of F2. It requires that nearly 2000 students be moved, many put at risk, a K-5 choice taken away, and a school that is already very successful at educating at-risk students (Lyndale) be split. There is a much simpler solution: create a single-building K-8 community school for F2. Both Barton and Ramsey are K-8 schools that hold at least 750 students. Each one individually can fit the whole of F2. If you decide to make either of those schools part of the solution to F2, why do you need Lyndale involved? What is the benefit to creating a dual campus mega-school, if a large enough K-8 is already part of the solution? Why would you need to disrupt so many students and put Lyndale’s kids and quality program at risk?

Perhaps diversity is the issue. That seems easily addressed. Draw the new boundaries for an F2 school to include a diverse community. Alternatively, make Ramsey F2’s community school, a suggestion that Ramsey itself has made. Then, those of Ramsey’s 1100 or so spots that are not taken by F2 students could be filled with Ramsey’s current ELL population, about 300 students. The resulting school would be filled and, with the ELL students, it would fall within the 70/30 diversity target ratio. In addition, keeping the 300 ELL students in Ramsey would decrease the number of students affected by the F2-related changes to 612 (Ramsey’s non-ELL students), significantly fewer than the 2000 in the Lyndale/Barton K-8 proposal. Moreover, Ramsey’s staff could stay the same, because the school is already K-8, thereby further minimizing disruption. This is a win-win situation for all: F2 gets the diverse, sustainable, K-8 community school they want, there is less disruption to students in Barton, Ramsey and Lyndale than in the Lyndale/Barton K-8 proposal, and the district meets its goal of 1 fewer magnet school for the city.

Then what about Lyndale? Lyndale’s own immediate neighborhood, D5, had 467 students: Lyndale currently attracts only 103 of them. With fewer local magnets and decreased busing, Lyndale could focus on improving its D5 “capture” rate to at least 65% (at least 200 more students). This would fill Lyndale’s building while allowing the school to continue to provide high-quality K-5 programs to its current population with minimal disruption. The result would be organic growth, stability, and a truly diverse population (close to a 60/40 ratio). We would happily have our boundary area increased to embrace part of F2 to ensure it. In fact, changing our boundaries to a sustainable size that encourages community school choice and ensures diversity is our preferred plan for Lyndale.

In summation

- A Barton/Lyndale solution disrupts too many children, offers great academic risk (especially to Lyndale's already at-risk student population), removes a quality, K-5 choice from Area C, and may be more expensive because it requires replicating programs
- Ramsey offers a sustainable, diverse solution to F2's need for a community school, if F2 feels it needs to stay together
- Lyndale is well-positioned to be a full, diverse school by adding more students from the surrounding community while continuing to serve its current population

Lyndale is a high-quality school that serves its students well and has earned the respect and trust of the educational community. We do not want our students put at academic risk for what seems a torturous solution for the F2 problem when easier, less disruptive solutions present themselves. Nor are we comfortable with our needs and our children being marginalized in a mega-school. Instead, we look to increase diversity and help the district reign in busing costs by welcoming our surrounding neighbors to the school. We are a successful community K-5 school. We would like to remain so.

The Lyndale School PTO

cc:

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Jackie Turner

Steven Liss

LYNDALE IS A QUALITY SCHOOL

AREA C K-5 SCHOOLS
QUALITY PERFORMANCE AWARD SCORES

	MATH	READING	SCHOOL CLIMATE	OVERALL QPA
BURROUGHS	3.07	3.56	4.67	3.64
LYNDALE	3.07	3.56	4.00	3.49
BRYN MAWR	3.50	2.94	4.22	3.44
KENNY	2.42	3.64	4.44	3.43
DISTRICT AVERAGE	2.71	2.75	4.02	3.08
ARMATAGE	2.62	1.94	4.56	2.79
KENWOOD	2.15	2.56	4.00	2.76
WHITTIER	2.00	1.69	3.11	2.13

LYNDALE IS A GROWING SCHOOL

LYNDALE ENROLLMENT TRENDS

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	10/1/08	3/1/09
K-5	314	327	345	357	352	384
PRE-K	20	20	17	20	20	20
TOTAL	334	347	362	377	372	404

LYNDALE IS A SCHOOL OF CHOICE

Our budgeted kindergarten slots are already over-subscribed and all of our High-5 spots have been filled for the 2009-10 school year. It is our hope that the district will budget one more kindergarten class for Lyndale to allow us to offer space to all those who have chosen us and more who have yet to choose.