

# ANSWER ME THIS!



## Questions and Answers regarding the 2016-17 Redistricting of the Washington Township Public Schools

### **Q: What is the importance of boasting a quality school district to a community?**

**A:** Nothing defines the vitality and health of a community, its property values and reputation of excellence, more than the quality of its schools. The Washington Township Public Schools offer a sophisticated and rigorous instructional program that provides variety, enrichment and multiple levels of intervention to students in need. We place great value on student achievement, proactively minimizing barriers to learning and personalizing instruction to ensure growth and measureable success. We encourage hands-on, discovery-based, inquiry-oriented learning. Countless opportunities for self-discovery, growth and expression, service learning and meaningful community service are embedded in the educational experience and serve to reinforce our mission of developing engaged and accomplished life-long learners who will collect, along with cherished Washington Township diplomas, the skills, self-worth and global perspective to share their talents with the world. Our schools are among the finest academically, most competitive athletically and most comprehensive and celebrated aesthetically in the State of New Jersey. Achievement, integrity, responsibility and empowerment form the basis of a Washington Township Education, an education that is ever more successful because of our partnership with the community.

### **Q: What is Redistricting?**

**A:** Redistricting is the redrawing of attendance areas and usually results in shifting some students from one school to another. The process is often necessary within school districts where attendance zones have grown, or shrunk, disproportionately to the occupancy capacity of each school building in the District. Redistricting is necessary not only to balance enrollment, but also to coordinate school bus routes. It is necessary to sustain the quality and equity of our schools.

### **Q: Why is Redistricting necessary at this time?**

**A:** In some Washington Township developments, attendance zones have grown, resulting in overcrowding in

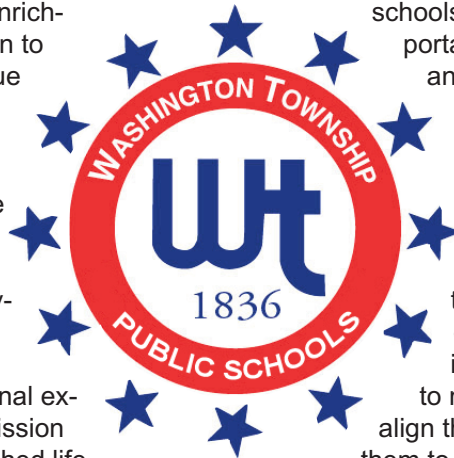
some of our school buildings. In other attendance zones, the population has diminished, resulting in occupancies that are well below building capacities. Redistricting is necessary for the start of the 2016-17 school year to balance enrollment, to create six contiguous geographic areas for each of our six elementary schools, to utilize our resources (including transportation, staff and funding) more efficiently, and to institute a much sought-after full-day kindergarten program.

### **Q: What is the goal of the Redistricting process?**

**A:** It is the goal of the Board of Education to maintain the neighborhood concept of our schools. To that end, the redistricting plan took into consideration the need to maintain established developments, to align them in a contiguous format and to assign them to sending schools based on the occupancy capacity of that building, in consideration of any special programs which may also be housed in that school. The process was formatted with the intention of creating a comprehensive plan which addressed pockets of the community, who had been moving across town and spending as much as 90 minutes on buses each day, and assigning them to their proper sending school. It was also a goal to impact the lowest percentage of students and families as possible.

### **Q: When was the last time the Washington Township Public Schools were redistricted?**

**A:** The Board of Education last redistricted in 1997, with the opening of Bunker Hill Middle School. Since that time, newer developments were constructed. Students living in those developments were not able to fit in nearby schools, so they were placed in elementary schools that had the space to accommodate them. Additional neighborhoods were shifted in 2004 to meet occupancy challenges with new developments. Currently, there are nine neighborhoods going to schools out of their geographical area.





## Redistricting Q & A (continued)

**Q: Who was responsible for formatting the Redistricting plan?**

**A:** Select members of the Board of Education and District administration rolled up their sleeves and took on the tedious work of redrawing boundaries to provide a more equitable distribution and utilization of resources. A Redistricting Committee reviewed enrollment data, transportation routes, building capacities, programming offerings and anticipated new construction and worked through several potential scenarios before deciding on the most viable option. The behind-the-scenes work was many months in the making. The final proposal was presented to the faculty and staff for input and then to the Board of Education for final approval.

**Q: It appears as if some neighborhoods are being moved to a new school that may be farther than their current school?**

**A:** This may be true in some cases. Our schools are not spread out evenly over the Township. Some neighborhoods are more densely populated, causing an uneven geographical distribution. This, combined with the capacity of our buildings, makes it impossible to ensure that all of our neighborhoods attend the elementary or middle school that is closest to their development.

**Q: How will redistricting impact District resources and the budget?**

**A:** Redistricting will have a positive effect by ensuring a better use of resources, balancing class size, by grade level, across the District. Teacher travel time between building will be decreased. Transportation will be more cost effective. Balancing grade levels will allow for more efficient utilization of existing staff, which directly impacts the number of staff needed to implement full-day kindergarten.

**Q: When will the proposed Redistricting plan go into effect?**

**A:** Students will report to their assigned sending school on the first day of school on August 31, 2016. Parents of students who will be changing schools will receive written notification and subsequent correspondences in the months leading up to the 2016-17 school year.

**Q: How many students will be asked to change schools?**

**A:** Approximately 420 elementary students and 249 middle school students will be directly affected during Redistricting. This represents approximately 15 percent of the

combined elementary and middle school population.

**Q: Will rising fifth- and eighth-grade students be permitted to complete the 2016-17 school year at their old schools?**

**A:** Yes. Waivers will be granted only for students who will be in fifth and eighth grade in 2016-17 and who want to remain at their present school. These waivers will be granted under the provision that parents provide all transportation to and from their previous school for the entire school year. Waiver forms will be forwarded to families eligible for this provision. All other students will be required to attend their newly assigned sending school.

**Q: What developments will be directly affected by Redistricting?**

**A:** Students who are domiciled in the following developments will be changing schools: County House Village, Crofton Run, Henley, Millstream, Nob Hill, Original Wedgwood, Sawyer's Creek, Sheffield Gate, Surrey Lake, Washington Way and Wrenfield.

**Q: Will teachers and staff be moved as part of the Redistricting plan?**

**A:** Yes. Some teachers and staff will be moved to different buildings as warranted by student population and programming needs. Since curriculum is standardized among the levels and within all of the schools, parents can anticipate high-quality instruction and similar support services in all of our schools.

**Q: Will I have an opportunity to address my concerns about Redistricting with the Board of Education?**

**A:** Yes, monthly public meetings of the Board of Education allow for public participation, at which time you can speak to the Board. Additionally, the community will be informed of special meetings that will be organized to address issues related specifically to Redistricting.

**Q: Will my child(ren) be given the opportunity to familiarize himself/herself (themselves) with their new school prior to the start of the 2016-17 school year?**

**A:** Yes. A number of transition activities will be organized at the elementary and middle schools in the spring of 2016 for all new students. Additionally, interested parents and their children will be invited to scheduled visitations and open house sessions so that they can jointly explore and become familiar with their new home school and its staff.