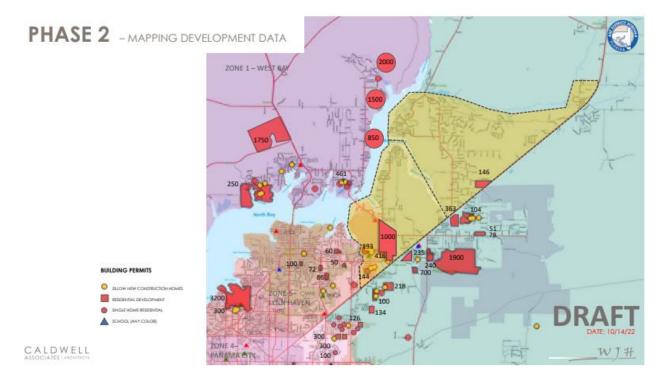
By Bill Husfelt

Superintendent, Bay District School

None of us like change, but change is inevitable in our world and change often precipitates progress and other improvements.

We're facing some of that change here at Bay District Schools when we consider our high school attendance zones. Exponential growth in some areas of our community has generated overcrowding at a couple of schools and a plethora of empty seats at a few others as populations migrate and shift to different corners of our county.

As you can see from the map below, there are also some significant housing developments planned in certain segments of Bay County, and those housing units will bring additional students to the zoned schools for those neighborhoods ... some of which are already at, or over, capacity.



We already have some imbalances in our high school populations that will only be exacerbated by these new housing units, so the time for change is now, however unpleasant we all may find that.

There are three reasons to rezone, in my opinion, and none of them have to do with school choice.

#### GROWTH

We need to rezone because we're going to have to build new high schools in the near future to accommodate growth but we can't justify borrowing money with taxpayers footing the bill for new schools when we have plenty of empty seats in other schools. School Board members and

Superintendents from decades ago chose where our high schools were built based on areas of growth back then. Since the hurricane, however, our populations have migrated and so we must ensure that we're wise stewards of taxpayer dollars by maximizing enrollment in under-utilized facilities through rezoning.

You can see from the chart below that several of our schools have plenty of room while others are at, or almost at, enrollment capacity per board policy. The enrollment capacity is defined as 90 percent of the number of students who can be physically squeezed into a facility. It's important that we try to stay at that 90 percent capacity to allow for new students to move into the zone throughout the year.

# PRESENT REALITY

1907 96.38%
1265 85.01%
678 77.58%
1615 83.55%

BAY DISTRICT SCHOOLS ENROLLMENT AND CAPACITY

#### DIVERSITY

We also need to rezone because we have some racial imbalances at some of our schools. We're responsible for trying to keep each school's racial balance near the district's percentages, and so we must move some students in order to achieve the diversity we all want to have for our students.

#### EQUITY

And finally, we must rezone to ensure that all of our high schools are of an equitable size so they can offer equitable programs. Smaller high schools have trouble funding the vast array of courses that larger high schools can offer and we want to ensure that ALL BDS high school students have access to similar selections of academic, and extra-curricular, offerings.

And so, change is inevitable.

Earlier this month, we held a workshop (you can watch that workshop to hear the plans and see if your student will be impacted at <u>https://vimeo.com/758071757</u>, the zoning discussion begins about the 1:40:05 mark) so School Board members could begin to explore the rezoning ideas and next month

there will be two public meetings where those impacted can have a chance to speak to the board about their concerns. These two meetings, in addition to regular School Board meetings, are scheduled for:

## Tuesday, November 8th, 3-4:30 p.m., Nelson Building, 1311 Balboa Ave., Panama City, FL 32401

### Monday, December 5<sup>th</sup>, from 5-6 p.m., at the same location.

There is MUCH more conversation to be had about this before decisions are made and we know that there's no way to please all of our stakeholders but we do want you to be aware of a few caveats that typically accompany any rezoning.

It will be my recommendation to the School Board that we:

- 1. Grandfather in all students who are currently attending schools impacted by rezoning.
- 2. Honor "sibling links" which means middle school siblings rising up to high school would be able to attend the same high school their older siblings are currently attending.
- 3. Keep the same school choice and hardship application process as options for anyone impacted by rezoning.

I firmly believe that, going forward, rezoning will have to occur more frequently to continue to accommodate the growth we're seeing in certain parts of the county. This current rezoning effort by the School Board is an important first step in that process.