



ANNEXATION FAQ #2



January 29, 2015 -- This document has been prepared by the districts of Dexter, Whitmore Lake, and the Washtenaw Intermediate School District to provide accurate information to the community in response to questions submitted by residents.

Annexation: Definition, Motivation, and Process

1. What is the process that Dexter Schools and Whitmore Lake Schools will use to make a decision?

The Dexter Board of Education (BOE) formed an Ad Hoc Committee on Annexation in December 2014. The BOE requested that the committees research and analyze the potential annexation of Whitmore Lake Public Schools (WLPS) to Dexter Community Schools (DCS). The committees were asked to address several critical issues including:

- The broad-based implications of annexation on DCS and the Dexter community;
- Identification of key variables -- both known and unknown;
- Identification of principal risks and benefits of annexation; and
- Identification of other long-term options that may be beneficial to DCS and students.

The Dexter committee is comprised of three members of the BOE (Daryl Kipke, Julie Schumaker and Michael Wendorf) and five members from the Dexter community (Regina Bell, Jennifer Kangas, Rob Mitzel, Marlo Rojeck and Tim Sposito). Whitmore Lake has also formed an Ad Hoc Annexation Committee comprised of school board members Bob Henry, Den Dignan, and Jim Vibbart. At the January 14th joint meeting between the Dexter and Whitmore Lake Ad Hoc Annexation Committees, it was decided that future joint committee meetings will be postponed until Dexter is able to complete its research regarding the implications of a potential annexation. Both committees felt that our time would be best spent working independently for now, and we would be more productive meeting jointly at a later date.

There will be a phased approach to researching annexation. At each phase, the committees will share its findings with their respective Boards. The Boards will then decide if the committees should continue to the next phase of research.

Phased Approach to Researching Annexation

- **Phase I** – Gather and analyze readily available information and identify "hot button" issues. Identify preliminary risks and benefits based upon what is currently known.
- **Phase II** – Conduct further research regarding "hot button" issues. Refine list of risks and benefits based upon what is currently known.
- **Phase III** – Explore long-term options which may be beneficial to both districts. Identify preliminary risks and benefits of each option based upon what is currently known.
- **Phase IV** – Conduct more thorough research of key questions/factors which are necessary to making an informed decision regarding annexation and/or other long-term options. Summarize risks and benefits of each option.

2. What is the criteria for determining if annexation is in the best interest of DCS?

The BOE has identified five criteria for evaluating the potential annexation of WLPS:

- Educational benefit and impact on our students;
- Impact on our employees;
- Impact on our community;
- Financial sustainability; and
- Reasonable risk profile.

3. When will this decision be made?

Updated 1-29-15: The process will take several months and will likely extend into the summer. Updates will be ongoing to keep the respective communities informed and there will be Informational Sessions to involve the communities.

4. Can the public attend the Annexation Ad Hoc Committee meetings?

Yes. All school board meetings, as well as committee meetings, are open to the public and are posted at least 18 hours in advance on the district's website and at Copeland Administration building. In addition, school board meetings, the Ad Hoc Annexation Committee meetings, and the Annexation Information Sessions will be videotaped and can be viewed on the district's Annexation Information page found at: <http://adhocdexterschools.weebly.com/>

5. What options, other than annexation, are under consideration by the Annexation Ad Hoc Committee?

The committee's research process is in the early stages. Later in the process, the committee will explore other long-term options, which may be beneficial to the district such as shared services or shared programming.

Annexation and Dissolution of Districts

6. Could Whitmore Lake be annexed to or merge with WISD?

This option is not possible under existing State law.

7. What would be the impact on Dexter Schools if Whitmore Lake Public Schools dissolves? Can the State force annexation?

Whitmore Lake Public Schools is not a failing school district nor is it in deficit. Given its current condition, it is not at risk of being dissolved.

Student Demographics and Achievement Data

8. What is the student population of Whitmore Lake?

Updated 1-29-15: 936

9. What is the student population of Dexter?

Updated 1-29-15: 3,557

10. How has student enrollment changed in recent years and what is the projected enrollment in Dexter and Whitmore Lake?

The population of K-12 students has declined throughout the State with a loss of 200,000 students (11%) reported in the last decade due to declining birth rates and net out-migration. (Citizens Research Council publication #1131, January 2015). Both Dexter and Whitmore Lake have likewise experienced enrollment declines. Fall 2014 Dexter enrollment was 3,557 students and Whitmore Lake enrollment was 936 students. Since 2009-10, enrollment in Dexter has declined by 95 students (3%), and enrollment in Whitmore Lake has declined by 403 students (30%). The Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) projects a 12% decrease in Dexter's school-aged population and an 11% decrease in Whitmore Lake Schools over the next five years.

11. How many Dexter and Whitmore Lake students attend other districts under the School of Choice option?

In the 2013-14 school year, 205 Whitmore Lake students and 159 Dexter students left their home districts to attend schools in other districts or charter schools. During the same year, 126 students attended Whitmore Lake through School of Choice compared to 27 attending Dexter. Note: Dexter has limited, not open, School of Choice enrollment for the children of employees and students enrolled in the high school IB Diploma Programme.

The most popular districts for Whitmore Lake students leaving their home district are Brighton (44), South Lyon (43), Pinckney (22), and Ann Arbor (16). Non-resident students attending Whitmore Lake most often come from Pinckney (62), Brighton (17), Ann Arbor (14), and Dexter (11). The most popular districts for Dexter students leaving their home district are Ann Arbor (36), Honey Creek Community School (26), Washtenaw Technical Middle College (25), Pinckney (21), and Whitmore Lake (11). Non-resident students attending Dexter most often come from Pinckney (8), Ann Arbor (7), and Ypsilanti (4).

12. How do graduation and college enrollment rates compare?

Both Dexter and Whitmore Lake had a 92% graduation rate from their respective high schools in 2013, the most recent year data are available. Data details: <http://tinyurl.com/DexterWLHSgraduate>

Over the last seven years, on average, 88% of Dexter graduates and 76% of Whitmore Lake graduates attended college within the first two years of graduating from high school. Among the Class of 2008 (the most recent cohort data available), 61% of Dexter graduates and 41% of Whitmore Lake graduates received college degrees within six years. Combining the data for both districts, on average, 85% of high school graduates attended college and 56% of the Class of 2008 received college degrees within six years.

The top colleges are the same for both Dexter and Whitmore Lake graduates with a slight re-ordering. Top colleges where Dexter graduates enroll are: 1) Washtenaw Community College; 2) The University of Michigan; 3) Michigan State University; and 4) Eastern Michigan University. For Whitmore Lake graduates, the top college choices are: 1) Washtenaw Community College; 2) Eastern Michigan University; 3) Michigan State University; and 4) The University of Michigan.

13. How does the socio-economic status of students compare between Dexter and Whitmore Lake?

Currently 9% of Dexter's students and 42% of Whitmore Lake's students qualify for free and reduced lunch (FRL). Dexter has the lowest FRL percentage in the county. If the two districts combine, the FRL percentage would increase to 16%. This would place the new FRL percentage as third lowest in the county, behind Chelsea and Saline (tied at 11%).

Impact on Students, Programs, and Services

14. What would be the impact on class sizes?

In recent years, class sizes have increased in Dexter due to declining funding from the State which necessitated reductions in teaching staff. With increased funding, class sizes could be reduced by hiring additional teaching staff with a priority being the lower grades (K-2 or K-4) in both geographic areas.

15. What are potential benefits for students?

Over the last decade, cuts to services and programs have occurred, as well as fees added for extra-curricular activities. With increased funding and a consolidation of central office staff, more dollars could be spent on classroom instruction and enhancing educational programs for students. This would benefit both Dexter and Whitmore Lake students and, individually, would not be possible for the two districts.

16. How would Whitmore Lake Schools be improved without decreasing educational opportunities for Dexter students?

Curriculum alignment, consistency, and the educational practices of DCS will be the model for all students in a combined district. Increased funding would be used to strengthen the educational program in both communities such as reducing class sizes, providing more individualized support, and expanding opportunities for advanced or accelerated students. Additionally, given the classroom space available in Whitmore Lake, the district could explore new programs such as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM), fine arts, early college, or other programs which respond to the needs of students in both communities.

17. Will current school attendance boundaries remain in place? Would Dexter students attend Whitmore Lake buildings and vice versa?

Updated 1-29-15: Boundaries for both Dexter and Whitmore Lake campuses will remain unchanged. Both communities would like to continue attending their local schools. Students who have historically attended schools in Dexter would continue to do so, and students in Whitmore Lake would continue to attend schools in Whitmore Lake. However, if there was a particular program available at one campus, students from the other campus would be able to enroll on a space available basis.

18. How would the buildings in Whitmore Lake benefit Dexter students?

There will always be families who prefer a smaller school or a new environment for a variety of reasons. Currently, eleven Dexter students attend Whitmore Lake Public Schools through School of Choice. They represent \$80,000 in lost State funding. Additionally, any new programs (e.g., STEM, fine arts, early college, etc.) housed on the Whitmore Lake campus would be open to Dexter students on a space available basis.

19. What will happen to the athletic programs in each district?

Updated 1-29-15: Whitmore Lake High School and Dexter High School are both comprehensive high schools that will continue to offer athletic programs for students. It is possible for Whitmore Lake High School to remain in the Tri-County Conference while Dexter High School remains in the SEC. There may be a potential for the district to offer some sports in one building, but not at both high schools. Opportunities for students to participate in sports offered at either school will be explored.

Impact on District Staff

20. Would Dexter teachers be moved to Whitmore Lake Schools and vice versa?

Not as a matter of course. There might be some movement, but only as teachers and programs dictate the change.

21. Are teacher jobs protected?

Dexter teachers would have the same protections that currently exist. Whitmore Lake teachers would become Dexter employees and would be covered by the existing teacher contract. State statute regarding annexation provides protection for teachers throughout the annexation process and transition.

District Financial Data

22. Will Dexter and Whitmore Lake debt be kept separate?

If Dexter Community Schools would annex Whitmore Lake Public Schools, there would be NO mutual assumption of debt. The residents in each community would continue to be responsible for its own bond debt. New debt acquired by a combined district would be shared debt and levied accordingly on all taxpayers within the combined district.

23. Where did Whitmore Lake's \$60M debt come from? What if Whitmore Lake is not able to cover their bond payments in the future?

Like Dexter, Whitmore Lake's voters approved bonds for facilities construction and improvements (new buildings, renovations, athletic fields, security, technology, and buses). The Dexter community has \$116 million in outstanding voter-approved bond debt plus \$13 million in the School Loan Revolving Fund. Whitmore Lake has \$59 million in bond debt and \$18.5 million in School Loan Revolving Fund. The debt from one community cannot be transferred to another community without voter approval. The law requires debt millage rates to be adjusted accordingly to ensure property owners fulfill their outstanding debt obligations.

24. What have DCS and WLPS done in recent years to reduce their budgets?

Over the last decade, all districts in Michigan have made significant cuts to staffing, programs, and services to respond to declining funding from the State and declining student populations. Dexter and Whitmore Lake are no different. Compared to 1994, the actual dollars available to educate Dexter students has increased only \$117 (not adjusted for inflation). Both Dexter and Whitmore Lake districts have made numerous adjustments to maintain balanced budgets.

Dexter has:

- Eliminated central office staff. Dexter is ranked in the 6th percentile (very low) among districts statewide. (MDE Bulletin 1014)
- Eliminated classroom teachers thereby increasing class sizes.
- Eliminated media center teachers.
- Privatized substitute teachers and coaches.
- Froze or reduced staff salaries.
- Created a new salary schedule for new teachers reducing salary levels by \$15,000 for a teacher with 10 years of experience.
- Increased staff contributions to health care.
- Instituted pay to participate fees.
- Moved to a single tier bus system.

Whitmore Lake has:

- Restructured grade-level configuration in the elementary (K-6) and high school (7-12) to accommodate middle school students. The middle school building is being utilized for athletic events, Early Child Center library events, and serves as a testing center.
- Eliminated building administrative positions. The MS and HS principal position was combined.
- Due to the recent retirement of the Superintendent in December 2014, the MS/HS principal now also serves as Superintendent.
- Teaching and staff positions have been eliminated.
- Reduced staff salaries.
- Increased staff contributions to health care.
- Privatized substitute teachers.
- Lease/rental agreements in former middle school spaces.