

## Letter: Final decision made with little resident input

Thursday, February 17, 2005

To the editor:

I'm writing in support of Jody James Avtges' letter printed Feb. 3 (page 6, "Whole process a disappointment"). She is certainly not alone in her observations. All of the problems she spoke of, and more, were apparent to those of us who tried to participate as concerned citizens in the redistricting process.

For most of us, it started with the publication of the proposal the afternoon before Thanksgiving when many of us were preparing for visitors or traveling. We listened to the administration's plan for redistricting at four public meetings conducted over the busy holiday month of December. We heard concerns raised by residents of at least eight different parts of town. We were encouraged to participate in the process and come up with some new ideas to address redistricting in ways that would best suit the needs of the children. Yet, no new ideas were incorporated into the final plan. As Ms. Avtges pointed out, on Thursday, Jan. 27, with a 30-minute discussion over a minor change involving six students, it was all over.

School Committee Chairman McFadden told residents that evening that all the 25 questions submitted would be responded to, but that didn't happen. Reasonable alternatives eliminating the need for voluntary bussing (busing not required by state law) and accommodating the concerns of residents were summarily dismissed without public discussion.





Open meeting laws prohibit school officials from discussing school issues as a group via e-mail, phone or outside the public forum. Yet with virtually no public discussion or exchanges, the redistricting plan, affecting hundreds of students, was a done deal. The little School Committee discussion that did occur was drawn out praise for all the hard work and consideration put into their plan and other blather. Amid patting themselves on the back, they lectured residents on how appreciative we should be and how the needs of Reading children will be best served.

Ms. Avtges called for an end to the games. I'm echoing her cry.






Bill Downing

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