

# Harlan Area Residents Take Issue With Eccentric Citizens' Group Disputes Editorial

To the Editor:  
Your editorial of Feb. 21, entitled "Look Beneath the Surface," is unfair and insulting to the Harlan area residents. This editorial is dangerous because it misinforms your readers; it is divisive to the whole Birmingham School District and community; and, also, it has badly damaged the reputation of The Eccentric.

Now, let us look at your "Look Beneath the Surface" editorial. You say, "On the surface, the Birmingham School District administration's plan for revising boundaries for the elementary and secondary schools appears to be out of reason in respect to the Harlan area."

We fully agree that this is true, and those of us who have looked beneath the surface know that this case the surface appearance is NOT deceiving.

Your editorial states, "on the surface, it appears ridiculous that students from the Harlan area should travel all the way to the Valley Woods and Groves sites."

Again, we agree, and this ridiculousness is multiplied by, at the same time, busing the Westchester and Bloomfield children to Derby on the east side of the district.

by bus, anyway; so why not bus them across the district and let the city center schools water? What! Wait a minute! Look beneath the surface and let the Bloomfield and Westchester students near the new junior high walk!

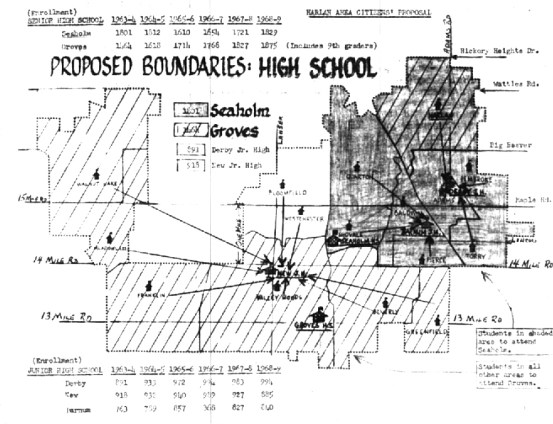
YOUR EDITORIAL states, "Because the Harlan area youngsters live outside the city limits, the school district will save about \$12,000 in costs since the state will pay two-thirds of the bill."

What does this mean? This is a misrepresentation of the facts since the plan would save \$12,000 over the Harlan Area Citizens' alternate solution. Had you "looked beneath the surface" you would have been aware of this since our plan is less costly.

Again, to quote from your editorial, "School officials wish they could work out a compromise to send the Harlan students to Derby—but it appears that there are just too many students living near Derby to make this possible."

Upon reading this, a Derby sixth grader commented, "Bloomfield and Westchester students, for instance?"

This mild cynicism is understandable when you realize that Derby is so near to the Harlan area that it is a walk-in school for many of these students.



## Writer Urges Paper to Take Own Advice

To the Editor:  
Your lofty and condescending editorial, "Look Beneath the Surface," is lacking several ingredients of good reporting, most essential of which is integrity.

Surely, you knew that the proposed plan not only includes busing Harlan pupils across town to Valley Woods but also requires the busing of Westchester and Bloomfield Village pupils across town to Derby.

This additional absurdity is so often "overlooked" by proponents of the administration plan. If you weren't aware of this basic fact, we urge you to take your own pious advice "to probe under the surface to seek a better understanding and appreciation of the total situation."

IT IS the half-truths of articles like yours and the evasive presentations of the administration which have so thoroughly aroused the residents of the Harlan area.

We readily acknowledge the complexity of the problem. We have great confidence in the thoughtful

## Editorial Overlooks The Basic Objection

To the Editor:  
The editorial appearing in your newspaper last week about the Harlan students being transported to the new junior high school overlooked, in my opinion, the basic objection to the school board proposal.

It is accepted and understood that it is necessary for the board to have authority to assign pupils to certain schools.

However, there should be some limit to the governmental power exercised by the board in assigning students to those schools which lie far beyond natural geographic boundaries in the community. In other states this has been a very sore point.

THE PROPOSAL that students residing in adjacent neighborhoods conscientiously of the Board of Education.

We urge careful consideration of the constructive proposals submitted by the Citizens Committee of the Harlan Area.

V. J. FORD  
4801 Burnley Dr.  
Birmingham, Mich.

Immediately north of the new junior high continues to occupy space at Derby Junior High, while Harlan students (being in the district immediately adjacent to Derby) will be transported many extra miles to the new school indicates shallow thinking or some unexplained obscure force.

More bluntly, why do the west side residents presently attending Derby apparently wish to continue such attendance enduring transportation problems when a brand new school has been erected in their own back yard?

OTHER POINTS were brought out in the editorial. Transportation charges, although billed to the State, are paid by all of us. The basic question remains, however, to what extent should students be transported beyond their own geographic area.

I think that it is the responsibility of your newspaper, the school board and the school administration to meet this problem fairly and openly according to those fair standards expected by the community at large.

DONALD STRATTON

# Raises Questions Concerning School Boundary Proposal

To the Editor:  
As chairman of the Citizens' Elementary Curriculum Committee, I think it advisable that I keep my name out of print in connection with the attendance boundary controversy. However, for what they may be worth, I submit the following comments.

First, Harlan parents feel that they have been grossly deceived by the administration.

In the 1961 millage campaign the impression was clearly created by the administration that one of the reasons for constructing the new junior high school on the west side was to take pressure off Derby by eliminating the need for busing children to Derby from the areas to the west.

Under the proposed plan this practice would continue while Harlan children would be bused across town in the opposite direction.

Second, the new junior high was programmed and designed as a three-year school. One question yet unanswered: Was this done knowing that the building would have to be used as a two-year school?

It is difficult to believe that the facts concerning impending school population were not known at the time this building was planned. It would almost appear that the manner in which the building would be used was a closely guarded secret at the time of the millage vote.

Third, the administration has failed to prove, at least to the residents of the Harlan area, that the secondary education program would materially suffer under the best available alternative plan.

If parents in this area could be shown, conclusively, that in the best of the alternative plans their children could not possibly fare as well, educationally, as they would under the administration's proposal, I am sure that some of the opposition would disappear.

For one, would accept the inconvenience of distance if I could be convinced that this was the only way to retain the best educational program. But the administration has yet to prove that its proposal is the only sound educational answer to the problem.

Fourth, the major objection to the proposed plan as far as I am concerned is an unacknowledged inconvenience it would entail. Apart from the additional student time on buses, there is the additional time and trouble to which parents would be subjected.

The Harlan parent with one child at Valley Woods would easily drive an additional 500 miles a year. Parents with two or three children (we would have three) at Valley Woods and Groves would drive an additional 1,000 miles.

These are conservative estimates; there would be instances where parents would find themselves driving twice these distances.

These estimates take into account missed buses, after school pickups, evening activities, appointments with counselors, doctors and dentists' appointments during school hours, week end social contacts with friends on the west side of the district, etc.

Parents on the west side would also be subjected to additional driving because of their children's school friendships on this side of town.

This distance factor would certainly reduce substantially the participation of Harlan students in many high extra-curricular activities, an area that already suffers from under-participation at Derby.

Fifth, the property value factor cannot be ignored. It is difficult enough now to sell a home in this area. If the administration's proposal were to go into effect, Harlan homeowners would experience a substantial depreciation in the market value of their properties. They cannot be blamed for having strong feelings on this point.

Lastly, your Thursday editorial

left much to be desired. In addition to over-simplifying the problem you helped further the myth that Derby over-crowding results from the fact that too many students live near the school, Westchester and Bloomfield Village students don't live anywhere near it.

Being an architect I am close enough to school problems to know how difficult it is to work out an attendance plan for an irregularly-shaped district like Birmingham's, particularly where educational program, staff, physical facilities, dollars and convenience all have to be balanced simultaneously.

What disturbs me in this instance is the seeming insistence on the part of the administration that there is no practicable, attainable alternative—that we must take it as part and like it.

Where is the proof that there is no reasonable alternative? We certainly did not get it at the Harlan School meeting two weeks ago.

WILLIAM LYMAN  
5395 Hickory Bend  
Birmingham

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BUT, LET'S look beneath the surface. Let's view the problems.

First, you say that because the Birmingham School District has a peculiar shape, much like a dachshund dog, "to get school enrollments derived from contiguous areas is next to impossible."

Had you given this more than a cursory glance, you would know that this is not a fact. As shown on the adjacent map, both the Bloomfield and Westchester areas are adjacent to the Valley Woods and Groves area, while Harlan is adjacent to four areas: Quanton, Baldwin, Adams and Pembroke, which all attend Seaholm High School.

THE CITIZENS' Committee of the Harlan area submitted to the administration and the board of education an alternate proposal which would allow Harlan area students to continue to attend Seaholm and would permit Westchester and Bloomfield students to attend the new junior high and Groves High School.

This plan would not interrupt the theory of continuity of education espoused by the school administration. Also, the Citizens' Committee plan would satisfy the criteria as outlined by the administration:

YOUR ARTICLE states that the administration "has devised a plan that pretty well gets students to the schools nearest them—except in the Harlan case." By busing Bloomfield and Westchester children across a large part of the district, the administration is ignoring the walk-in new junior high nearest them.

Concerning the Harlan children, you state that "the theory is that these students must be transported

"1. To equalize educational opportunity, the designed capacities of school buildings should be adhered to as closely as possible.

"2. The number of times a student must transfer schools should be held to a minimum, particularly at the senior high (See GROUP, 7-A)

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