

Understanding School Choice in the Edgewater Area Schools



**Edgewater
Elementary**



Lumberg Expeditionary
Culture. Community. Commitment



**MOLHOLM
LOBOS**



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Edgewater Collective

PARTNERSHIPS FOR A THRIVING COMMUNITY



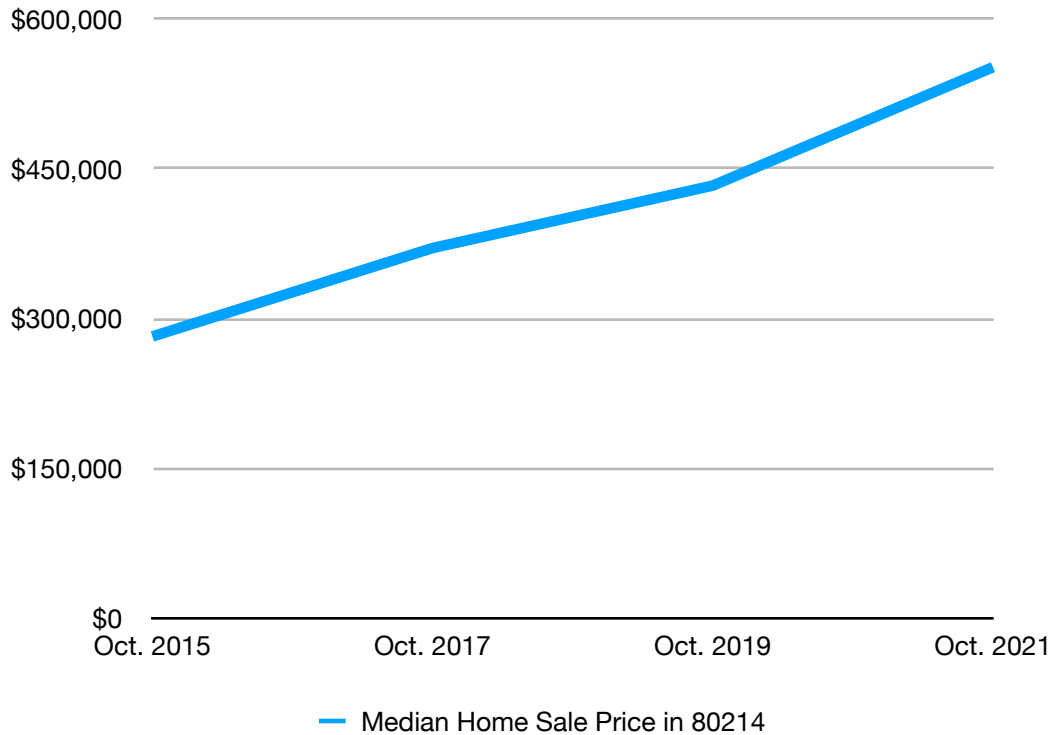
The 80214 Area: A Changing Community and Its Impact on Schools

Since our work with schools began in 2013, we have been watching the rental rates and home prices in the 80214 area to see potential impacts on school enrollment. Student enrollment directly impacts the funding that our local schools receive from the county and state. Specifically, we keep an eye on enrollment at Jefferson Junior/Senior High School and the three elementary schools that feed into Jefferson (Edgewater, Lumberg and Molholm). These four schools are all in the 80214 zip code area and the homes and multifamily complexes where students live are in this zip code. The 80214 zip code includes all of Edgewater and small sections of northeast Lakewood and southeast Wheat Ridge.

Since 2013, the Edgewater area has seen new businesses come into town starting with Joyride Brewing Company at 25th and Sheridan, and most recently, with the opening of the Edgewater Public Market in 2019. This business development has brought new residents to Edgewater and home prices have increased substantially.

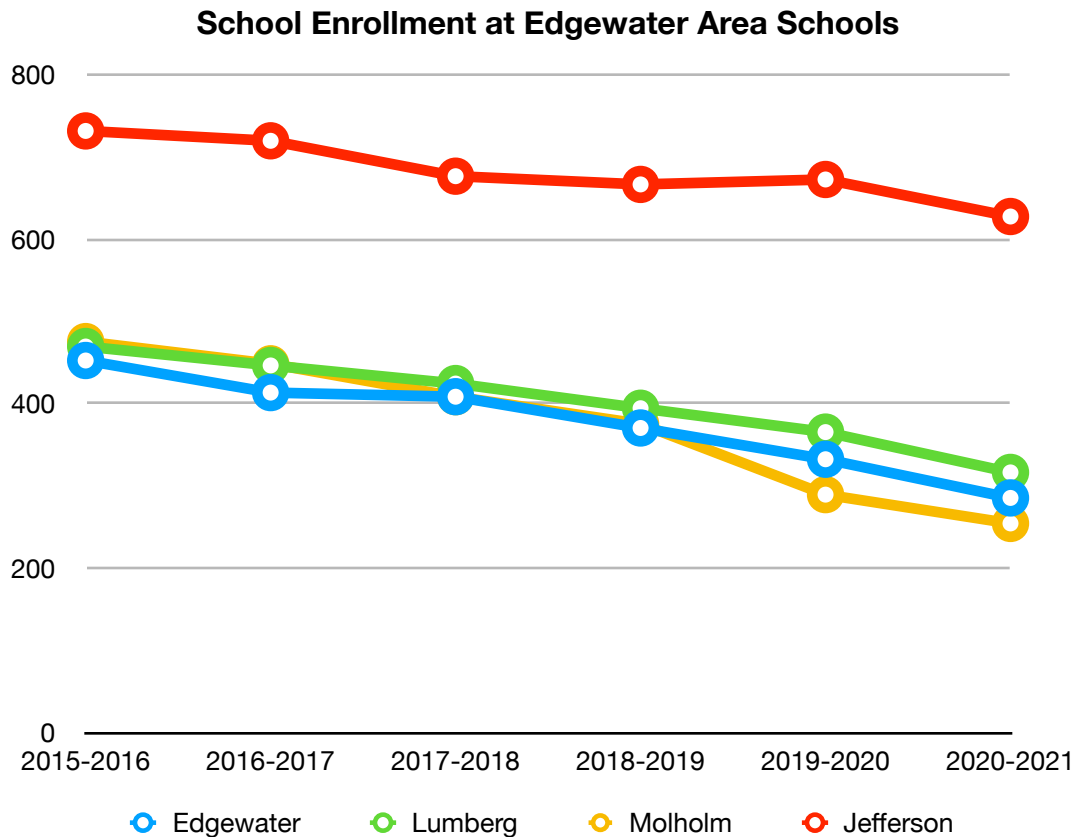
Redevelopment has also occurred along RTD's West Rail Line, which has brought new apartment complexes to the West Colfax corridor to the north of Molholm Elementary School. Older homes are being scraped and newer townhomes are being built in the Two Creeks Neighborhood that surrounds Molholm. Renewed interest in the area has increased through the efforts of the West Colfax Community Association and 40 West Arts.

Median Home Sale Price in 80214



The median home sale price in the 80214 area has almost doubled from October 2015 to October 2021. This rapid increase in the price of homes in 80214 also mirrors rising rents in apartments in the 80214 area. Even before the pandemic, school staff were hearing from families who had to leave the area schools because they could no longer afford to live in the area. Some families were able to find housing outside the area in cities like Aurora and Arvada and yet still drive their children to schools in the Edgewater area.

We've seen the growth of new apartment complexes that cater to the desires of a younger demographic moving into the area. Older apartment complexes change the name of their complex and update amenities to change the image of their community. There has been some construction of affordable housing complexes through the great work of West Metro Housing Solutions, but they have been the exception.



Since 2014, all four schools in the 80214 area have seen a student enrollment decline. Jefferson Junior/Senior High School’s enrollment has seen the slowest decline at 14%. Edgewater Elementary has enrollment declines of 36.9%, Lumberg at 32.6% and Molholm has the largest enrollment decline at 46.5%. Though these enrollment declines are large, the elementary enrollments are not small compared to some other Jeffco Public Schools elementary schools.

During this time, Edgewater Elementary School became a two-way dual language school where students can learn in Spanish and English. Lumberg Elementary School became an Expeditionary Learning school where learning is challenging, adventurous and meaningful.

Jeffco Public Schools has not publicly stated that they are starting discussions around school closures, but just this past spring they closed Allendale Elementary School in Arvada. We want to be proactive as a community to develop innovative solutions so none of our schools will be on the closure list in the next few years.



Combating Declining Enrollments: Understanding School Choice

At Edgewater Collective, one of the key parts of our mission is cultivating partnerships for **thriving schools**. We are well aware that efforts to increase student enrollment in a changing community can disenfranchise and marginalize our Latino community members who are already disproportionately feeling the impacts of the pandemic and rising housing costs.

For this reason, we have taken active steps to form a Family Council that meets monthly to collaborate with schools. At this Family Council, the voices of Spanish-speaking Latina moms are prioritized and valued. We are also collaborating with Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition to create Parent Leadership Teams at all four schools. It is essential that the voices of families and students that are currently involved in our local schools are prioritized and valued.

We also launched an online school choice survey in the fall of 2021 to start understanding the values and decisions that families make around choosing a school for their child. Through the survey we focused on three groups of families:

- Those who have children who attend schools in the Edgewater area
- Those who have children who don't attend schools in the Edgewater area
- Those who have children who are not in school yet

Our hope is that the data collected through this survey can continue valuable conversations with families, school leaders, district staff and the community about how to create innovative solutions that will result in thriving schools that families want their children to attend.

Survey Basics

63 respondents completed the survey (it does not necessarily mean that all the participants responded all survey questions). Almost two third of the respondents (40 individuals) have kids that are attending school from kindergarten through the 12th grade.

The survey was administered through SurveyMonkey. The survey was available in English and Spanish, but a large majority of the survey participants took it in English. We were thankful to have the expert help of data analyst Berkay Gülen who we connected with through the Catchafire platform funded by Community First Foundation.

Responses from Families Who Chose Edgewater Area Schools

17 respondents told us their kids attend the Edgewater area schools (Edgewater Elementary, Lumberg Elementary, Molholm Elementary or Jefferson Junior/Senior High School). For those parents, the top three reasons to send their kids to the area schools are (1) diversity of the student population, (2) knowledge/comfort with school leaders/teachers, quality of the programs, and (3) distance from home to school. On the other hand, the least important top three reasons in choosing the Edgewater area schools are (1) test scores, (2) transportation/bus options, and (3) school ratings.

To juggle between different priorities, the parents used different methods to get information about schools. While majority of them (42%) took school tours, some of them read online materials about the school (33.3% of the respondents) and asked other parents (25% of the respondents).

Through the information they gathered, two third of the parents did not consider sending their children to a school outside of the 80214 area. When asked what the main motivations are/were in choosing a school within the 80214 area, parents mentioned distance from home to school and improved quality of the school staff are two game-changer reasons.

Besides the parents' experiences with the school, the survey also focused on the students' experiences in the 80214 area. When asked about the students' experiences, a majority of parents said they do have positive experiences. To improve the positive experiences, the parents recommend adopting more two-way dual language programs (82% of the respondents), creative arts and STEM programs (63% of the respondents agree for each option) in the area schools. In terms of extra-curricular activities, parents would like to see more STEM, athletics, and band programs, accordingly.

Responses from Families Who Chose Other Schools

A majority of the survey respondents (23 out of 40) answered that their kids do not attend school in the 80214 area. 55% of them did not ever consider sending their kids to a school in the Edgewater area. The major reasons that affected their decisions are (1) quality of the programs (according to 70% of the parents) and (2) curriculum (55%).

The least important reasons that affected their decisions to not send their kids to the Edgewater area schools are (1) transportation/bus options, (2) availability of before/after care programs, and (3) school ratings.

For this group of parents, they made their decisions mainly through asking other parents (65% of the respondents did) and reading online materials about the school (60% of the parents).

When asked about what factors would have changed the school decision of parents, respondents mainly relied on opportunities to meet school staff/parents/students and school tours.

Once we look at the motivations behind their decisions to choose a school outside of the Edgewater area, the parents mentioned diversity and lack of variety in curriculum, again. We would like to quote from a few parents here:

'The Edgewater area schools are dual language where the vast majority are native Spanish speakers. My family are not native Spanish speakers. I did not want my child being at a disadvantage of learning the core skills in their native English first. A look at the neighborhood schools suggested they were underfunded in terms of facilities and programs/ athletics offered compared to neighboring Jeffco schools.' (Slightly edited for the context)

'Our elementary school, Edgewater Elementary only had half day pre-school for 3-year-olds. We were looking for full day. We found a Jeffco charter school with full day pre-school and we just stayed there for elementary. We also couldn't afford private preschool. We were also told by a teacher at Edgewater that they didn't do anything for kids who are above grade level because they were too busy catching kids up.' (Slightly edited for the context)

Previous knowledge of the parents on the Edgewater area schools also affected their decisions in choosing a school. Some of the reasons for not choosing a school in the Edgewater area are:

'We looked primarily at Jefferson and there were concerns about discipline/ safety at school and a lack of a rigorous academic programming (e.g., IB, AP).'

'My daughter attended Jefferson for 1 semester and found it chaotic- more crowd control going on than learning.'

Finally, for non-Edgewater area parents, academic programs and extra-curricular activities still matter. Their preferences regarding the academic programs in the Edgewater area schools are STEM programs (55% of the respondents' choice), two-way dual language (40% of the parents), and creative arts (35% of the respondents).

Regarding the extra-curricular activities in the Edgewater area schools, parents that chose non-Edgewater area schools prefer to have athletic programs (84% of the respondents), band (74% of the respondents), and choir (63% of the respondents).

Responses from Families Whose Children Aren't School-Aged

Roughly one third of the respondents (23 out of 63 respondents) have kids that are preschool age or younger. Although not all the respondents detailed their school choices, the data based on 18 individuals' responses shows that 83% of parents have not decided what kindergarten their kids would attend yet.

In that sense, it is helpful to understand what the priorities of those parents are before making decisions regarding kindergarten options. The top three reasons for choosing a kindergarten are: (1) quality of programs (83% of parents agree), (2) school rating, safety, and curriculum (50% of parents demand these qualities), and (3) recommendation of other parents and closeness of home (44.4% of parents expect these features).

Accordingly, the least important reasons to choose a kindergarten are: (1) transportation, bus options (55.5% of parents do not prioritize transportation options), (2) availability of before/after care programs (33.3% of parents don't factor these programs in their decision), (3) test scores (27.7% of parents do not pay attention to test scores).

When we look at the responses in-detail regarding the priorities in choosing a school for kindergarten, respondents would like to get first-hand experience of the curriculum and staff. One of the respondents notes that it is important that the family “has the opportunity to go to the facilities or meet the teachers and learn about their programs.” An effective bilingual program and location of the school are the second most important reasons that would eventually influence kindergarten choice.

Since the parents would like to have first-hand experience of the school facility and curriculum, they would like to attend school tours (71% of the respondents agree) and have opportunities to meet school staff in the community (53% of the respondents). Local school stories in the newspapers or online media outlets would be the main information source to make/change the decision about the school.

Although those parents do not have kids attending an elementary or high school, they already have some perception about the neighborhood schools in the Edgewater area. Their main information source is the poor school ratings and low-test scores. Compared to the parents whose kids attend those schools, the parents that have younger kids are only aware of indirect information. Resources are online school ratings and test scores.

Their expectations from the Edgewater area schools (once their kids are at that age) are STEM programs, two-way dual language, and creative arts. Regarding extra-curricular activities, the parents would like to see athletics, STEM, and band programs in the Edgewater area schools.

School Choice Survey Highlights

As we've studied the responses from families, we've come away with some highlights.

Importance of School Visits and Meeting School Leaders

School visits and relationships between the school and community are so important to families for the school choice process. Families that chose Edgewater area schools for their children knew the school leaders at the school and felt comfortable with them. Those that chose schools outside the area relied on conversations with other parents, but said that interacting with school staff might have changed their decision. School visits and interacting with school leaders and staff are even more important for families whose children are not in school yet.

Increase in Academic Programs and Rigor Desired

From families who decided to send their children to schools outside of Edgewater, the quality of programs and academic rigor were reasons why they chose another school. Low academic growth and performance scores at Edgewater area schools don't help the community perception of quality academic programming at these schools. Academic programming and rigor are even more important to families with children who aren't in school yet.

STEM and Creative Arts Focused School Desired

When all three groups of families were asked what type of programs they would like to see in the Edgewater area schools, they chose two-way dual language programs, STEM and creative arts. As Edgewater Elementary School is already a two-way dual language school, there is an opportunity to create a new program model at Molholm Elementary School that is influenced by STEM or the creative arts. A creative arts focused curriculum at Molholm could build on the momentum of the 40 West Arts District in the neighborhood.

Recommendations from the School Choice Survey

As we've studied the responses from families, we've come up with some recommendations to increase enrollment.

Plan for Fall School Tours

It is essential that school leaders have the support they need to organize and implement school tours in the fall and winter as families start their school choice process. It's important for families to meet school leaders and experience what happens in the classrooms of the Edgewater area schools. Edgewater Collective can help support and advertise the events with partners throughout the community.

Create More Opportunities for School Leaders to be at Community Events

Edgewater Collective can work with the City of Edgewater and other partners to inform school leaders about community events and ways they can attend these events. Community events create a great way for school leaders and teachers to meet families. They also provide a great platform for student performances and involvement so families can experience the school's culture.

Start a Program Design Process with Molholm Elementary

With the fastest decline in enrollment, Molholm Elementary School needs to start a process of getting input from school families and the surrounding community about the option of becoming an arts or STEAM focused school. This would bring renewed interest in the school and possibly bring new resources to Molholm.

Increase Enrollment Through Innovation and Partnerships

When Jefferson became a 7th-12th grade junior/senior high school, the Jefferson Plan discussed the possibility of the area becoming an Innovation Zone. This systemic change would allow school leaders to innovate in ways that best fit their school, teachers, students and families. This would also bring in new funding resources to implement the innovations. For instance, Edgewater area elementary schools would be able to offer full day preschool for working families from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. if that is what families are requesting.



Edgewater Collective

PARTNERSHIPS FOR A THRIVING COMMUNITY

Schools Can't Do It on Their Own: The Role of Edgewater Collective

Schools need quality partnerships to increase student enrollment and create thriving neighborhood schools. Here's a look at the programs Edgewater Collective is focused on in 2022 and beyond to achieve these goals:

- **Jefferson Success Academy:** After school and summer programming to bring math, literacy and enrichment programs to our area elementary schools to help students grow academically and holistically.
- **Family and Youth Council:** As we seek to increase student enrollment in our local schools, it is important to give current families a voice and leadership in decision-making. The Family Council and Youth Council raise up family and youth leaders in the area and allows them to co-create solutions.
- **Worker Cooperatives:** It is essential that we move deliberately to create wealth for families so that they can continue to live in the Edgewater area and send their students to area schools. Worker cooperatives give families an opportunity to become owners in a cooperative business and take home more income.
- **Communication and Marketing:** Edgewater Collective will continue to utilize the online news site Edgewater Echo to tell stories of what is happening in our schools and advertise school events. A new video series "Brews on the Edge" will give school leaders a chance to tell their stories to the community over a cup of coffee or tea.
- **Innovation and Funding:** We will continue to advocate for systems innovation in the Edgewater area schools so that school leaders have the autonomy to do what is best for their teachers, students and families. We will also seek funding to make these innovations possible.