



Howard County

George Howard Building
3430 Court House Drive
Ellicott City, Maryland 21043-4392

Dr. Calvin Ball
District 2

Jennifer Terrasa
District 3

August 11, 2017

Dr. Michael Martirano
Interim Superintendent
Howard County Public School System
10910 Clarksville Pike
Ellicott City, MD 21042

Cynthia L. Vaillancourt
Chairman, Board of Education
Howard County Public School System
10910 Clarksville Pike
Ellicott City, MD 21042

Dear Dr. Martirano and Esteemed Members of the HCPSS Board of Education,

During a well-attended community meeting/panel discussion held on Wednesday, August 2, 2017, at Oakland Mills High School which had a panel made up of Calvin Ball, Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) staff, and Oakland Mills PTA leaders, a number of serious concerns were raised which we trust have been communicated to you through staff. However, there were several issues we found particularly alarming which we believe deserve more immediate attention. We have enumerated these below:

First, we are extremely concerned that the Feasibility Study¹ proposal does not meet the community goals of inclusion and diversity or the policy set forth in Board of Education Policy 6010 which includes a requirement that “Where reasonable, school attendance areas should promote the creation of a diverse and inclusive student body at both the sending and receiving schools”; however, the result of the proposed redistricting could lead to further segregation of our schools. For example, the proposal if adopted would increase Free and Reduced Meals (FARM) percentages in schools with already high percentages. (Talbott Springs Elementary School [TSES] would go from 50% to 74% FARM). Additionally, the proposal does very little to address the issue of diversity and, in fact, would move TSES from 75% minority to 90% minority. When this issue was raised at the recent panel discussion in Oakland Mills, HCPSS staff noted that there are a number of factors that the Attendance Area Committee (AAC) considers when evaluating a plan, and stated that none are weighed more heavily than others² because everyone has different factors they see as important. However, we believe that a plan’s potential to segregate our schools both racially and economically is different in kind than other factors the committee must weigh. It is unacceptable to make schools that lack diversity and already have high levels of FARM students more segregated. We ask that you re-examine your redistricting policy, so that the segregation is not considered equal to other factors such as whether an area is an island, whether the area has been redistricted before, and whether there are strong feeds from elementary school through high school.

Second, we are concerned about the data that has been used throughout this process. Early in July, concerns were raised about the FARM data being significantly flawed, and yet the AAC continued to conduct their work with this inaccurate information. It was only this week that we received a memo providing us with the corrected FARM data; however, the AAC has almost completed their work, including having released a draft plan. Adding another layer

¹ Note, we cannot evaluate the relationship between this policy and the AAC proposal because that data is not yet available.

² However, from our subsequent discussions with staff, we understand the committee did set goals and prioritize certain factors, such as utilization, over others.

of complexity to this issue, the community is now being asked to provide comment on the draft plan, but they do not have the corrected data.

Inaccuracies in FARM data are of particular concern and have the potential to have a major impact on the Oakland Mills Community. For example, while the data currently available to the public reflects 33% FARM at TSES, the corrected data indicates that it is actually 50% (with the feasibility proposal bringing it to 74%); the original data shows 11% FARM at Oakland Mills Middle School (OMMS), while the corrected number is 49%; and Oakland Mills High School was originally set at 38%, with the corrected data being 47%. A school with a projected FARM rate of 74% should be alarming to everyone. And, we strongly believe, this is something the AAC should have known when working on their proposals. While we know that there will be further opportunity for community input and changes to the proposed plan once it leaves the AAC, we find it unacceptable that you would consider recommendations from a committee using flawed data. It should be obvious that to make boundary line adjustment proposals that will make for sensible and helpful redistricting, accurate FARM and other data are essential.

Finally, we would like to remind you that HCPSS has promised on several occasions that a Spanish translation of the Feasibility Study would be made available. However, this translation has still not been completed. Without a translation available, a significant portion of the population in the Oakland Mills community is cut off from being able to understand the issues, and are thus unable to give meaningful input. While we are hoping the translation is made available ASAP, we are again concerned about the timing. That is, this translation will not be available until the AAC is done (or almost done) with their work.

Although the redistricting process is well underway, as the County Council representatives of the Oakland Mills school community, we felt compelled to bring these concerns to your attention so that they may be addressed by you ASAP. We know that Howard County students' best interest is just as important to you as it is to us, and we trust that you will look into these concerns. We look forward to hearing from you on this matter.

All the best,



Jennifer Terrasa
Councilwoman



Dr. Calvin Ball
Councilmember

CC:

Jonathan Edelson
Kay Wisniewski
Lynn-Steven Engelke
Judy Gottsagen
Bill McCormack, Jr.
Paul Verchinski
Ginny Thomas