



Oakland Mills Community Association
The Other Barn • 5851 Robert Oliver Place
Columbia, MD 21045

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June 3, 2019

Dear Chairwoman Ellis and Members of the Howard County Board of Education:

The Oakland Mills Community Association strongly encourages you to look for opportunities to adopt a FY 20 operating budget that avoids cuts to teachers, classroom support staff, and academic programs, including fine arts and technology. If such cuts must be made, we also urge you to consider the impact of targeted cuts already made to schools such as those in Oakland Mills during previous budgets – including the removal of World Language from Stevens Forest Elementary, Talbott Springs Elementary, and sixth grade at Oakland Mills Middle; the elimination of the Elementary School Model; and the already-proposed elimination of the Reading Recovery Program at both Stevens Forest and Talbott Springs.

Further cuts, whether they target programs or apply across the board, will impact schools like those in Oakland Mills greater than they impact the average Howard County school. With children in Oakland Mills schools receiving nutritional assistance at outlier rates relative to the rest of the county, this economic indicator of poverty should also signal to you that gaps caused by cuts are less likely to be filled through alternative funding streams for many children in these schools. When 45 to 65 percent of families in schools need assistance with basics like adequate nutrition, the odds that loss of instruction will be compensated for by private tutoring, music lessons, and other alternatives are much smaller here than in other parts of the county. Also, please keep in mind the assertion of many, including Dr. Martirano, that these rates are under representative of the true needs in our schools as some families do not apply for assistance or live just across the cutoff for receiving assistance. Therefore, even across-the-board cuts will have a disparate impact on schools like those in Oakland Mills and surrounding areas.

There have been cuts throughout the system over the past few budgets, but these cuts are felt most acutely in places like Oakland Mills, where, in addition to our schools having some of the highest proportions of children receiving meal assistance, we also have the highest proportions of English Language learners, and racial and ethnic minorities. Each of these groups tend to have lower test scores and graduation rates than the county averages, and some studies indicate that the achievement gap is greatest in Howard County among all of Maryland's jurisdictions. However, Oakland Mills families, teachers, and administrators work hard to close this gap, and results have been promising. Of the groups mentioned, all have higher graduation rates at Oakland Mills High School compared to the county average. Families choose Oakland Mills schools for their diversity and inclusion as well as for programming not found in other county schools. Please don't put these positive trends at risk.

The school system's Operating Budget should support every student, but it should also support each student, thus recognizing unique needs and the stark differences among some of the county's schools. This is the definition of an equitable operating budget, and we encourage you to consider the impact of

any cuts on schools like those in Oakland Mills. Equal is not equitable, and you should strive for a budget that reflects equitable treatment of our children. Our schools simply cannot sustain more cuts.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input as you deliberate the final FY 20 Operating Budget.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jon L. Edelson", is positioned above the printed name.

Jonathan L. Edelson

Chairman, Oakland Mills Community Association Board of Directors

Chairman, Oakland Mills Community Association Education Committee

cc: Dr. Martirano, HCPSS Superintendent