



Oakland Mills Community Association
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August 12, 2019

Dr. Martirano, Superintendent, Howard County Public School System
Howard County Board of Education
10910 Clarksville Pike
Ellicott City, MD 21042

Dear Superintendent Dr. Martirano and Members of the Howard County Board of Education:

The Oakland Mills Community Association is submitting the following feedback on the area boundary adjustment “Feasibility Study” options on behalf of its 10,000 residents in anticipation of the August 20th recommendations from the Superintendent to the Board of Education. We are sending this as we believe the process for input and the survey options provided to date do not provide for enough flexibility to state our concerns to their full extent. The Feasibility Study options cannot be fixed with commentary on a few polygons here and there, which is the direction in which the public survey effectively guides respondents. Furthermore, the encouragement of such feedback over the years has led us to a situation where we believe the school system is segregated by income, race, and ethnicity and continuing to move in a negative direction should current options be pursued. We have concerns throughout the system, but our responsibility is to the children of Oakland Mills, so our commentary will be limited to the impact on schools our community attends.

The current Feasibility Study options unfairly target Oakland Mills High School, and frankly, are immoral. HCPSS Policy 6010 is supposed to direct the school district to consider such factors as community stability, demographics, diversity, socioeconomic status (measured based on participation in the federal free and reduced meals program, or FARMs), numbers of students moved, and academic performance. By multiple critical measures, apparently this policy does not seem to apply to Oakland Mills High School in the current options. We fear that while the public message has been that these options are not “proposals,” the reality is these are being used as very biased starting points that depend heavily on past trends toward segregation rather than a fresh start.

Currently, Oakland Mills High School is already the most challenged high school in Howard County. It has the highest percentage of students who receive FARMs (48%), the lowest

percentage of students with math proficiency (26%), and the third lowest percentage of students with reading proficiency (47%). It is one of the few schools in Howard County with capacity to receive more students, so it is not surprising that this capacity is being utilized to help relieve over-crowding at other high schools, which we welcome. However, we did not anticipate that the district would make so many favorable changes to other high schools largely at the expense of Oakland Mills HS.

Let us consider how each of the two high school redistricting proposals in the feasibility study negatively impacts Oakland Mills HS and further exacerbates the existing differences in socioeconomic status and academic performance between Oakland Mills HS and the rest of Howard County.

First, in High School Redistricting Option #1, 383 students will be transferred from Oakland Mill HS to other high schools, which is 29% of the projected 2019 enrollment, more than any other high school, even overcrowded Howard HS (19%) and Centennial HS (22%). In other words, inexplicably, the high school with capacity to spare is losing a larger percentage of its student population than the over-crowded high schools that are the reason for the redistricting in the first place. Another 512 students will be transferred into Oakland Mills HS, which is 39% of 2019 projected enrollment and again highest in the county. Altogether, as a proportion of the 2019 projected enrollment, a gross change of 68% would occur at Oakland Mills HS, again more than any other high school in the county.

If such a drastic change in the student population at Oakland Mills HS were truly necessary, it would only be logical (and would follow Policy 6010) to take this opportunity to bring the demographics and academic performance measures of the school more in line with the rest of the county. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Rather, the FARMs percentage would increase (49%, by far highest in county), and math proficiency (25%, lowest in county) and reading proficiency (45%, 2nd lowest in county) both would decrease relative to current levels. Furthermore, other neighborhoods around Oakland Mills Village, which have been part of the Oakland Mills HS community for more than 40 years, would be transferred to Wilde Lake HS, which should be considered a major detriment to community stability, and effectively creates an “island” community East of Route 29 from the rest of Wilde Lake HS. In their place, communities in the I-95/Route 1 corridor would be transferred into Oakland Mills HS. These also effectively become “island” communities because they are only connected to the rest of the Oakland Mills HS area via Polygon 45, which is not a residential neighborhood but rather a retail/industrial area along Route 175/Columbia Gateway with few (less than the reportable number) or no students.

One particular move in HS Option #1 is an especially troubling example of the larger problem of concentration and segregation. Polygon 1081 is a highly impoverished neighborhood and by far

has the largest numbers of students who receive FARMs compared to any other polygon in the county (96 students on FARMs, 74% of all students at the high school level). At the elementary school level, there are 223 students who receive FARMs (83%), which means the number high school students receiving FARMs will almost certainly increase over time. Both Howard HS (3 miles via Rt. 108, 8 minutes according to Google Maps) and Long Reach HS (2.6 miles via Rt. 108, Snowden River Pkwy and Tamar Dr., 7 minutes according to Google Maps) are geographically closer and more convenient for transportation to/from this neighborhood compared to Oakland Mills HS (4.8 miles via Rt. 175, Tamar Dr., and Kilimanjaro Rd., 13 minutes according to Google Maps). Yet in this proposal the students will be bused further to Oakland Mills HS, which is already the most socioeconomically disadvantaged school in the county. This is wrong, plain and simple, and it will be harmful both for students currently at Oakland Mills HS and also students residing within Polygon 1081. It is hard to imagine a clearer example of socioeconomic segregation in the 21st century.

High School Redistricting Option #2 is not an improvement over Option #1 in terms of its impact on Oakland Mills HS. Again, despite being the school with capacity, Oakland Mills HS would have the greatest gross change in population in the county, with 178 (14%) students transferred from, and 297 (23%) transferring into Oakland Mills HS, representing a 36% gross change in population based on 2019 projected enrollment, more than any other high school in the county.

Again, much like Option #1, despite the major change in student population at Oakland Mills HS with Option #2, there is apparently no effort to consider demographics and academic performance measures in the proposed reassignments. The percentage of students receiving FARMs would be unchanged (48%), still highest by far in the county with only one other high school greater than 40%. Reading proficiency would actually decrease from the current level to 45%, 2nd worst in the county. Similarly, math proficiency would decrease to 24%, worst in the county. This option is also detrimental to community stability, as the Thunder Hill neighborhood (part of the Oakland Mills Village and well connected by walking/biking paths) will be transferred to Wilde Lake HS, essentially becoming an “island” community East of Rt. 29. Oddly, this proposal consolidates all of Thunder Hill ES to attend Oakland Mills MS, which currently feeds 100% into Oakland Mills HS, so this could have been beneficial to the community if they did not then have to cross Route 29 to attend Wilde Lake HS. Again, similar to Option #1, the Allview neighborhood (part of the Oakland Mills HS community for more than 40 years) will be transferred to Atholton HS and again essentially will become an East-of-29 island. While Polygon 1081 (discussed above) and surrounding communities are not assigned to Oakland Mills HS in HS Option #2, they are proposed for Oakland Mills HS in the New HS #13 Option, so all of the same concerns noted above would also apply in that scenario.

These analyses are compiled and summarized in the attachment to this letter. In summary, there is no evidence that HCPSS Policy 6010 is being appropriately followed in the proposed high

school attendance areas when one considers the negative impact on Oakland Mills HS, which is already the most challenged high school in Howard County. The Oakland Mills Community Association has very serious concerns about long-term trends toward segregation in the school system and specifically about what will be proposed during this round of area attendance adjustments. We are consulting with experts in the field should further action be necessary to protect our residents and strongly urge you to consider much better options by August 20th than what we have seen to date. We also strongly encourage the members of the Board of Education to reject any proposal presented to you on August 20th that does not reverse these trends.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jon. L. Edelson", is placed over a light gray rectangular background.

Jonathan L. Edelson, Chairman
Oakland Mills Board of Directors

Cc: County Executive Dr. Calvin Ball
Councilman Dr. Opel Jones, District 2

ATTACHMENTS ON FOLLOWING PAGES

Attachment: Oakland Mills High School Characteristics Relevant to HCPSS Policy 6010

Current

- Projected 2019 enrollment = 1318 (94% utilization)
- Highest FARM Rate in Howard County (48%)
- Worst PSAT Math Proficiency in Howard County (26%)
- Third Worst PSAT Reading Proficiency in Howard County (47%)

HS Option #1 Scenario

- 383 students transferred out of OMHS (29% of 2019 projected enrollment, highest in county), despite being a school w/capacity
- 512 students transferred into OMHS (39% of 2019 enrollment, highest in county), all from Long Reach (splitting up these students across multiple receiving schools would be an opportunity to balance demographics and academic performance measures)
- Gross change of 895 students, 68% of 2019 projected enrollment; highest in the county
- Projected FARM rate 49% (increased from current, highest in county, with only 1 other HS greater than 40%)
- 25% PSAT Math Proficiency (decreased from current, worst in county)
- 45% PSAT Reading Proficiency (decreased from current, 2nd worst in county)
- Howard HS and Centennial HS are the most over-crowded high schools in the county, yet there are fewer students transferring out:
 - Howard HS: 359 (19% of 2019 projected enrollment)
 - Centennial HS: 366 (22% of 2019 projected enrollment)
- Polygon 1081, which has the largest numbers of socioeconomically disadvantaged students in the county (and growing), is transferred from Long Reach HS and bussed further to Oakland Mills HS: 96 (74%) students at the HS level, 104 (86%) students at the MS level, and 223 (83%) at the ES level are all on FARMs.
- Polygons in the I-95/Rt.1 corridor are effectively “islands” in this proposal. They are connected to other Oakland Mills HS polygons via Polygon 45, which is a commercial/industrial region with few or no students.
- Allview and other neighborhoods, historically part of the Oakland Mills HS community, will be transferred out of OMHS and will become and East-of-29 island communities at Wilde Lake HS.

HS Option #2 Scenario

- 178 students transferred from Oakland Mills HS (14% of 2019 projected enrollment)
- 297 students, all from Long Reach HS, transferred into Oakland Mills HS (23% of 2019 projected enrollment)
- 475 total students transferred into/out of Oakland Mills HS, a 36% gross change based on 2019 projected enrollment (highest in county)
- Changes at Oakland Mills HS greater in comparison to Howard HS and Centennial HS:

- Howard HS: 230 (12%) students redistricted to Long Reach HS, will receive no new students
- Centennial HS: 246 (15%) students transferred out, 117 (7%) transferred in
- FARMs rate 48% (unchanged, highest in county)
- PSAT Reading proficiency decreased from current level to 45% (2nd worst in county)
- PSAT Math proficiency decreased from current level to 24% (worst in county)
- Consolidates all of Thunder Hill ES to attend Oakland Mills MS, but then sends these same students across Route 29 to attend Wilde Lake HS (essentially creating an island) and removes the Thunder Hill neighborhood, part of Oakland Mills Village, from Oakland Mills HS.
- Allview neighborhood, historically part of the Oakland Mills HS community, will be transferred out of OMHS and will become an East-of-29 island community at Atholton HS.
- As in Option #1, polygons in the I-95/Rt.1 corridor are effectively “islands” in this proposal. They are connected (and only in a catty-cornered manner) to other Oakland Mills HS polygons via Polygon 45, which is a commercial/industrial region with few or no students.

Table: Overall Impact of Proposed High School Attendance Adjustments on Oakland Mills High School		
HCPSS 6010 Factor Considered	HS Option #1	HS Option #2
Facility Utilization	Negative (>110% utilization in 2021-2022)	Negative (>110% utilization in 2022-2023)
Community Stability Overall	Negative	Negative
Feeds	Negative	Negative
Contiguous Communities (considering the reality that Route 29 and commercial/industrial Polygon 45 separate communities)	Negative	Negative
Frequency of reassignment	N/A	N/A
Racial/ethnic composition	N/A	N/A
Socioeconomic composition/FARMs percentage	Negative ¹	Neutral ¹
Academic performance-Math	Negative ²	Negative ²
Academic performance-Reading	Negative ³	Negative ³
% of English learners	Negative ¹	Neutral
Number of students moved	Negative ⁴	Negative ⁴

¹Highest in county

²Worst performance in county

³Second worst performance in county

⁴Highest in county as a proportion of school size

N/A, not analyzed or considered in this assessment