Good evening Board of Education. My name is Luka van Herksen and I am a 7th grader at Rocky Hill Middle School and a former student of Clarksburg Elementary. I am here to share with you my thoughts on the superintendent's recommendation.

I know many of my neighbors will talk about the transportation issues with the superintendent's plan...so I won't focus on that, but please know it is the biggest problem with the proposed plan. I will say that I would not like to wake up any earlier than necessary. Currently high school students in Cabin Branch are picked up at 7 am to be at school on time. What time would I have to wake up to be at school at Seneca Valley? I did some digging and noticed that school times were changed so that students could sleep longer. Why is the school board ignoring their research and dismissing all the effort that went into creating a plan so that students would have more time to sleep? I think Clarksburg kids need sleep too!

I would also like to discuss DIVERSITY. For some reason I think the board doesn’t realize the demographics of my neighborhood. To help you I have added an attachment describing the diversity at Cabin Branch.

This is very personal to me. I am in 7th grade and have gone to 6 schools in 3 different countries. Often I was the ONLY black kid at school, sometimes at a school with over 1,000 students. After moving to Clarksburg, specifically for the diversity, I finally found a place where I wasn’t an outsider.

In the last 3 years we have lived here I have made close friends and I am sad to know that most of my middle school friends will be going to Clarksburg High School.
I not only had dreams of attending Clarksburg to go with my friends, but I love to act and perform
musical theater and I have been following the program at Clarksburg for three years, and I couldn’t
wait to go. And I know what you are thinking, “Luka, they are going to have a great drama program at
Seneca.” I actually was part of the cast at the Seneca Valley High School production Christmas Carol
last year and I met some amazing students, great teachers and really enjoyed it. But what I didn’t like
was sitting in traffic when my mom would pick me up from rehearsals between 6 and 7 pm and we
had to sit in that traffic on 270 going home. It was hard to get my brother to his baseball games on the
days I had practice at Seneca. And just think when I am high school my mom is going to have to
coordinate activities for kids in three different schools in three different zip codes.

This is not about not wanting to attend Seneca. I actually think it will be great! This is about making
sure that kids have time to rest, complete homework, participate in activities and not spend countless
hours sitting in traffic every year. I know my dad has to worry about the traffic when he goes to work
in DC, he doesn’t have a choice. But as students, should we really be having to deal with traffic if we
have schools right in our neighborhood that we can go to? It doesn’t make any sense to me.

The rest of my testimony I would like to direct it to the student member Nathaniel Tinbite. I am
wondering why you are ignoring us? The last time you came to my school was for the elections. I
actually voted for you. Why haven’t you visited my school to see what the students think about this
plan? You haven’t been responding to emails. The kids are asking you questions and you are
ignoring them. I know you have an opinion and you believe in the superintendent’s recommendation,
but don’t you have a duty to put Option 9 on the table if so many of your fellow students are asking
you to review it. You say this is what the students want, well I can introduce you to many students
that feel differently. Doesn’t “all mean all” at MCPS? Our voices should matter too.

I hope you reconsider and vote to discuss Option 9. I ask all of the board to do the same. Bring
Option 9 back on the table.

Thank you.

Luka van Herksen