Hello, My name is Celia Bidwell and I am a sophomore at Seneca Valley High School. I would like to thank everyone here tonight for the opportunity to talk about the impact on high poverty rates, the opportunities provided, as well as why I love Seneca Valley so much.

I am a member of the Principal's Advisory Council where we take a look at everything going on at our school from slow moving hallways to our sense of community and look for ways to help our school reach its full potential. The goal in the subgroup I'm in is to help embrace our school pride and to come together as we transition from the old to the new. I absolutely love how supportive our staff is to our students and how we learn and grow off of our total population. Seneca Valley is such a culturally diverse environment that we have the opportunity to learn about all the different cultures represented by our student body.

Our school as a whole provides an amazing education and many opportunities that other schools may not have available for their students, which makes it hard for me to understand why people are so upset with having to come to our school. Seneca Valley is an IB world school but also allows students to mix and match with AP classes as well as IB which is a great way to spice up student’s education. Students also don’t have to commit to the full IB diploma program in order to take some IB classes.

Another important topic to discuss is Poverty. Our current FARMS rate is 39%, which is higher than the county-wide average and well over the FARMS rates of Northwest and Clarksburg. We were beyond ecstatic to see Dr. Smith recognizes our current situation and implementing that into his recommendation. If our FARMS rates were to increase, our school would be deprived of our fullest potential as a school including the decrease in field trips. As it is now, we are limited to the number of trips we have overall due to the number of students who require financial assistance. If our level of poverty increases, our school will not be able to handle paying to fund all those students.

Another challenge that high FARMS schools have to work around is parent support when it comes to athletics. As a member of Varsity swim and dive, I experience a sport that does not function without parents involvement because meets are entirely run by the parents. However some of team sports including lacrosse, field hockey and more just barely have enough players to field a team. Some students may not be playing these sports because they don’t have access to the equipment required to play and the teams don’t have enough parent involvement or funding to be able to provide for those students. Even if people do decide to join the team to play and have some fun, they may not end up coming back the next year due to not having many club players to help build the team up. Given the high poverty rates their parents don’t have the money to provide being on a club team or classes for improvement let alone money to support their families.

We are very grateful to be getting a new school to help better our educational environment and are looking forward to the new programs and opportunities coming to Seneca. Thank you for listening and on behalf of Seneca Valley, we hope you consider supporting Dr. Smith’s recommendation for the new boundaries of our school.