Good evening BOE members, Superintendent Smith and Dr. Zuckerman,

I am Melissa Regan, Cluster Coordinator for Seneca Valley. Thank you for the additional time this evening for CIP testimony. We are fortunate in our cluster that most of our schools have the space needed to accommodate the thousands of students on our side of Germantown. Lake Seneca ES, the smallest in our cluster by far, has been over enrolled for many years. After the feasibility study, funds have been allocated for the planning phase. Thank you very much for this next step and for watching enrollment at Lake Seneca ES. Germantown’s population rose 38% in the last census and an additional 24% in the period prior. We are also thrilled for the nine communities on the Major Capitol Projects list. We hope that Eastern, Twinbrook, Summit Hall, and Damascus ES make it onto the next list. Besides those biggies, we are in support of Ms. Smondrowski’s request last week for an ongoing list of minor projects and that might technically come under ‘maintenance’. We are in favor of the new work order tracking system so that schools know where they stand with needed repairs such as the leaking roof at Martin Luther King MS, that ruined the gym floor and the bleachers ☹️.

In addition to the actual buildings that house the students and staff, the Seneca cluster has joined forces with the Clarksburg and Whitman clusters and the DCC to bring awareness to Safe Routes to Schools. In 2019 so far, Vision Zero reports that 104 pedestrians and cyclists under age 18 (our students) have been hit by cars in Montgomery County. 119 last year. If you include adults which many of are our parents, 437 have been hit this year as they have been walking or cycling. Last week it was an Einstein student standing at his bus stop that was hit by a car. Last Fall, the Kennedy high school students standing at their bus stop along Georgia Avenue. It’s not just bus stops that are affected, its walkers. Students walking to Clarksburg HS along RT 355 have walked along the shoulder in the street or on the grass because there hasn’t been a side walk. It took 8 years but one side is getting a sidewalk! The opposite side also has a neighborhood and needs a sidewalk on that side. It’s not just bus riders and walkers, the students in the parent drop off loop have not been spared. Both Rock Creek Valley ES and Flower Hill ES have had students hit in the drop off loop. Einstein HS has students that are dropped off that then walk through the bus loop to get to the front door, all the while a dozen buses are pulling through as they arrive, unload, and depart. Students that live in the Bannockburn neighborhood play frogger to cross River Road to get to Whitman. Woodland ES students don’t have a drop off and get out of cars along
the street. In order for the best teaching to occur, students need to arrive safely to school. MCCPTA initiated a new joint partnership with the MCPS Department of Transportation who in turn has invited MCDOT, SHA, MCPD and staff from the MCPS Security team. We are hopeful that by having multi-agency representatives at the table, we can make some headway to resolve education, engineering, and enforcement problems. We have expanded our thinking of CIP beyond the walls to include parking lots, sidewalks, and bus stops. We hope that every pathway can be reviewed for safety. The Safe Routes to School concept began when Seneca Valley lost Christina Ward Morris in 2012, killed on Rt 118 on her way to school and we are thankful for the positive conversations with MCPS to hopefully prevent any further tragedies.

Speaking of Seneca Valley HS, we hope you have had the chance to see the progress from time to time. There was months of digging and I was asked ‘When will we see some walls?’ Framing went up and I was asked ‘What is the part along Middlebrook?’ ‘What is over there along Wisteria?’ Windows went in (which our current building has none of, not sure what architects in the early 70s were thinking) and brick masonry went up to complement our nearby Black Rock Performing Arts Center and that’s when I heard ‘It’s massive’. Our island footprint demanded height so up the floors went. The new building absolutely dwarfs my alma mater. We look forward to welcoming many new students for years to come to this flagship building and I’ll see you at the ribbon cutting.
BOE members, Superintendent Smith and Dr. Zuckerman,
Here at SV, we have a new building with plenty of open seats. We have neighbors at NW and Clarksburg that are bursting at the seams. **Well, let’s just draw up some new boundaries so that students are not in significant overcrowded conditions.** If only it was as easy as that sounds. I attended 17 boundary study meetings over the course of a year and heard everything from “that sounds cool to we will move”. The Seneca Valley community experienced something similar when NW and QO were built. Screaming Eagles became Jags and Cougars. There was a boundary change between my younger brother and I going to high school: I attended Seneca Valley and he attended Gaithersburg. However, I am not minimizing the difficult feelings that are attached to re-assignments. I know traditions are in place. I know some will have a longer journey (similar to our Cedar Valley/Sally K Ride neighborhood where students attend MLKMS, the fourth farthest from their neighborhood.) If everyone could just attend the closest school to their home then that would be most convenient. Unfortunately, due to the distribution of neighborhoods throughout the county, public schools would vary widely in demographics. Why does this matter? The Century Foundation’s research found that on average, all students in socioeconomically and racially diverse schools have higher test scores, smaller achievement gaps, higher levels of critical thinking skills, and less anxiety. This boundary study, as well as the county wide look see, has an opportunity to make a positive impact overall, not just for some.

The Seneca Valley community supports option 11a and the Superintendent’s option. In consideration of option 11a, all of Germantown ES are re-assigned from NW to SV. There are so few of these students, about two dozen, that the SV community would like to keep them from split articulation and we have the spaces for all of them.
For those that will join us in the Valley, here is some real deal information about our school and students:

Myth: There isn’t enough rigor at SVHS.
Fact: Our IB program is flourishing and we have AP classes available of course as well.

Myth: There still isn’t enough rigor at SVHS.
Fact: We have the nationally certified Project Lead The Way engineering program and the certified CompTIA Cyber Security program. Pre-med? Then the BioSciences Health Profession track is there for you. Want to combine the IB with one of the career tech programs? Sure, you can do that.

Myth: SV graduates don’t get into the University of Maryland College Park.
Fact: Dozens of Screaming Eagles were accepted this past spring and together, they had an average gpa of 4.1. Prefer a smaller, techier school? Then join the Screaming Eagles accepted into UMBC with an average gpa of 4.3.

Myth: SV graduates don’t get into good colleges.
Fact: Recent alumni are now at Alabama, Penn State, Mason, Madison, Virginia Tech, GW, Catholic, Ithaca, North Carolina A & T, Morgan, Temple, Arizona, Syracuse, UVA and more of course. What about service academies? In the last four years, we have two cadets at West Point and two middies at the Naval Academy. What about ivies? Yep, in recent years we have sent students to Princeton, Dartmouth, Penn, and Cornell.

Myth: SV athletics has one team that gets most of the attention.
Fact: SV gives all our teams attention from soccer to bocce to poms to golf to football – each team is equally supported.

Myth: SV’s drama/musical department is quiet.
Fact: When your music director raps at the BOE Hamilton style and becomes an international viral sensation then you know what’s on our stage is top notch.

Balancing geography and demographics in the options is difficult. An option where all students can attend their closest school without a huge disparity of demographics just doesn’t exist well. 11a and the Superintendent’s recommendation get as close as possible and we fully support this decision.