Good evening Superintendent Smith, President Evans and Members of the Board, I am Sarah Kessler, speaking on behalf of Torie Rodriguez, Northwest Cluster Coordinator. Last Wednesday night I had the CIP testimony on at home, vaguely listening to which schools the students were from and wasn't paying much attention until I heard a guy from RM mention Germantown and the Northwest Cluster. Nick Asante's testimony about the Superintendent's recommendation was spot on. We agree that Option 11a is the best choice for most equitably distributing students among the three clusters and sets an important precedent for all boundary decisions moving forward.

If all high schools looked like Northwest, there would be no need for a countywide boundary study. With an almost even distribution of black, white, Asian and Hispanic students, a FARMS rate in the 20s, a signature program and several academies, our high school truly has something for everyone. Unfortunately, over the past decade, the same cannot be said for Seneca Valley. Shortly after Northwest opened as the second high school in Germantown, Seneca Valley had a white population of 44% and a FARMS rate of 14%. Since then, the Hispanic population doubled from 16% to 32% and the FARMS rate soared to 37%. As families moved to the Germantown area, they chose a newer high school over an aging one with lead in the water and cracks in the ceilings. While their completion date moved from 2016 to 2017 and then 2019 to finally 2020, the disparities between the two schools grew larger. We now have an opportunity to make adjustments which will lower their FARMS rate and provide a more balanced racial distribution. This benefits the greater Germantown community.

Our cluster would like to thank you for addressing the split articulation at Great Seneca Creek ES, allowing all students to attend Kingsview Middle. While the recommendation solved this issue, it creates several cluster splits at the elementary school level. This recommendation is actually Option 11a for the Clarksburg Cluster combined with Option 6 and 10 for the Northwest Cluster. Option 6 and 10 reassign the Clopper Mill and Matsunaga Islands, as well as only the upper portion of Germantown ES. Options 5, 5a, 9, 11a and 12 are identical for the Northwest Cluster, reassigning all of Germantown ES and the Islands near Seneca Valley. These Options were overwhelmingly chosen by our
cluster in the survey responses. Options 5 & 5a were top for Round 1 and Option 9 followed by 11a and 12 were preferred for Round 2. The cluster supports these Options that provide effective capacity relief for Northwest and keeps all of Germantown ES together.

With only 300 students, Germantown is one of the smallest elementary schools in the county. Their entire high school population is less than 200 students – only 25 students per grade would go to each high school if split. While one rationale provided for dividing Germantown is not to put Seneca Valley HS over capacity, it remains under capacity for the entire five-year projection. Their community is understandably concerned about the effects of splitting such a small school and prefers that they stay together. We hope the Board will request updated enrollment numbers for Option 11a as originally written to see the effect on the capacity of both high schools.

If MCPS is proposing to divide one of the smallest elementary schools in MCPS between two clusters, additional rationale consistent with Policy FAA should be provided. One criterion is to “maximize walkers.” When a request was made to MCPS Transportation and the Division of Capital Planning to obtain a map of the portion of Germantown ES that can walk to Seneca Valley HS, we were told it is not available to the public. Walkability to Clarksburg HS was mentioned as a reason to change the assignment for a subset of Gibbs students so this factor must be considered for Germantown ES.

Attached to this testimony is a detailed map of the proposed split for the Germantown ES area. The cluster boundary line weaves between houses and backyards and isolates one cul-de-sac in the Fountain Hills community from the rest of the homes in that HOA. The area in the circle (and attached photo) is an open area of backyards where neighbors gather. By separating Lake Placid Lane from the rest of the houses, it creates the need to bus just that cul-de-sac of 15 homes to Northwest HS when they could walk to Seneca Valley HS. Residents of the single-family homes say it will cause division in their neighborhood to have just one street stay at NW when the rest are reassigned to SV. There is Fountain Hills HOA fencing along the sidewalk beginning before Lake Placid Lane and continuing up the street that clearly identifies this area as one cohesive unit.

If the Board ultimately determines it is not possible for all of Germantown ES to stay together, we ask that a more logical cluster division be made considering major geographic features (such as forested areas with breaks in the sidewalk), roads (not backyards) and walkability.

In conclusion, we thank the MCPS staff who devoted such a tremendous amount of time to this study and appreciate the Board of Education’s consideration of our testimony.

Sarah Kessler on behalf of Torie Rodriguez
2019-2020 Northwest Cluster Coordinator
Proposed cluster division for Germantown Elementary School area
Cluster division runs through backyards (circle area on map)

Forested area dividing walkers to Seneca Valley and Northwest HS (circle area on map)
Seneca Valley Boundary Study

Splitting GES is like splitting a pea . . Why do it?

DON'T SPLIT GERMANTOWN

GES
Total student population = 320 (K-5th)
WHY?

Each year
about 23 students
will attend
NORTHWEST HS

Each year
about 22 students
will attend
SENeca VALLEY HS

SUPPORT OPTION 11A

BUT keep GES students together!

Germantown Elementary School is one of the smallest schools in the county graduating only 40-50 fifth graders each year. This is a very small community of students. Tell the BOE to support the Superintendent's recommendation for the Seneca Valley Boundary Study BUT make this change. OPTION 11A has a boundary line right through backyards of neighbors in the same community. Fountain Hills. The number of students being redirected to SVHS is minimal, estimated to be around 20-25 students. It doesn’t help or hurt either high school to make this change. We send all of GES to SVHS OR keep them all at NWHS. Just keep them together.

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