Good evening Superintendent Smith and Members of the Board of Education. I have been an active volunteer in the schools, in a variety of capacities, since my oldest child started kindergarten and I take great pride in our schools and community. One of the MCPS Core Values is Excellence and I share that value with you. I would like to let you know what Excellence means to me and how I see this reflected in the Superintendent’s recommendation for the Upcounty Boundary Study.

Germantown has been recognized as one of the most diverse areas in the country. We need to capitalize on that diversity in all of our schools to enable all of our students to reach their fullest potential. Promoting diversity is not just about equity and fairness, it is about a higher quality experience for all of our students. There are now numerous studies to show that diverse groups, where there is a diversity of thought shaped by a variety of experiences, are more productive teams and bring more efficient and creative solutions to problems across an array of career sectors, including: business, science, medicine and defense. Scott Page, an economist at the University of Michigan, has collected reams of data and written several books on this topic, including: The Diversity Bonus: How Great Teams Pay Off in the Knowledge Economy and The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies. Most proximal to our population, studies of students in college have shown that more diversity among students engaged in small group discussions resulted in more novel contributions to the discussion and more complex thinking from the group.

With all of these studies showing the benefits of diversity and knowing our children are growing up in a more diverse world, we cannot ignore these data if we want them to be in the best position for contributing at the highest levels in school and their eventual profession. We can no longer say that we are striving for excellence if we do not raise up diversity within each individual school as a key factor in achieving excellence.

To be clear - there is no path to excellence without diversity.

This is a core value I live everyday myself as an educator. It can sometimes be hard and there could be more expedient solutions but I would rather take the hard road than settle for incremental change and lose the potential for real innovation and progress.

Among all of the options that have been considered, Superintendent Smith’s recommendation is the best choice for student achievement and the communities at all three schools. While there is an issue of equity and fairness, it is even more than that. It is about excellence and creating opportunities for all students to experience different perspectives, embrace difference, and have an expanded worldview that will enhance their education and their future potential. When we are talking about something this important, everything else is a secondary concern, including bus times. In reality, some students already have bus times as long or longer than what have been reported here just due to the availability of busses and routes that need to double-back to the school.

There are no studies to suggest that concentrating poverty in an area will improve student outcomes. Of all the options that have been considered, Superintendent Smith’s
recommendation would add value and increase the educational environment for close to 7500 students. Other options that have been considered are not even close to bringing this much benefit, in fact all of the other options would further disadvantage and negatively impact Seneca Valley, creating even wider disparities with its neighbors.

It is time that those of us truly concerned about student achievement at a population level take a stand on our values and support Superintendent Smith’s recommendation.