Good Evening Dr. Smith, President Evans, and members of the Board of Education,

I am Revonne Johnson. I am a Northwest High School parent and I am also representing the NAACP Parents’ Council. We commend you for the inclusiveness, transparency, and patience that you have shown during this process. We also thank you for considering the feedback from our minority parents focus groups. Parents appreciated the opportunity to have their voices heard. Based on 1) feedback from these focus groups, 2) MCPS’ equity initiative, and 3) the mission of our organization, we expect student diversity to be a higher priority factor in your decision making, followed by geography and utilization.

The Parents’ Council currently supports the Superintendent’s recommendation. We recognize that this was a difficult decision for the Superintendent given the numerous opinions and biases involved. The Superintendent’s recommendation is by no means PERFECT, for there is no single option that satisfies the litany of issues facing MCPS. No one involved in this process will get everything they want. So what you have in the Superintendent’s recommendation is a combination of choices that collectively provide the BEST option for all students, the affected schools, and the district at large.

This year’s theme at our annual kickoff will be “Championing Equity and Equality in Education”. Everyone is here as a champion for something or someone. We should all be here championing for our students but, some are here for other reasons, like fear of change, ongoing racial biases, or concern for property values. But this should be about the students.

I have a couple of slides that I want to share with you. They are from the slide presentation that we will be using at this year’s kickoff. This graphically shows the difference between equality and equity. In this graphic the boxes represent the quality of education being given to that student. As you can see, circumstances and disadvantages that students inherit at birth often stand in the way of a basic education. They cannot see the game of life and how it is played. They need an extra hand up, an extra box. This is what the Parents’ Council is championing for . . . extra support, extra time, extra resources, more experienced teachers, more minority teachers, and socio-economic support to ensure that all students can see over the wall. This may require some inconveniences, like traffic, new articulation patterns, more kids in your school who don’t look like you. But we think that it is important that everyone understands WHY equity and equality are so important in education.
I received a post over the weekend that was shared by an MCPS alumni student who was impacted by numerous boundary changes during her years as an MCPS student. She explained how she dealt with traffic, bad neighborhoods, and constant change in school assignments. She summed it up by saying, “I turned out just fine and so did my friends.” She then told us to “Chill out” . . . reminding us that Montgomery County still has one of the best school systems in the country.

Seneca Valley was the flagship high school for Germantown. It stood long before Northwest and Clarksburg. For this reason alone, it deserves our respect and our support. Over the last decade, Seneca Valley has watched its reputation as a high achieving school deteriorate to one of low achievement and high poverty. This school community has been unfairly saddled with a negative image that has impacted demographics, academic programs, and advancement opportunities. Seneca Valley wants, and deserves, to shed this negative image and so that it can be seen on equal footing with neighboring high schools, Northwest and Clarksburg. So, we ask fellow residents and neighbors to stop the smear campaign against Seneca Valley High School. Comments that include insensitive phrasing—such as, “the prison on the hill” OR “murdering thug gang members who need to be in prison” OR “it’s a less productive learning environment,”—must stop. Seneca Valley is a great school. And with the opening of the new school building, it will be an even better school. But we have got to champion for this as a community—Germantown and Clarksburg together.

We have other concerns that we would also like for the board to consider. Among them,

- Consider grandfathering sophomores, allowing them to remain at their current high school. The stability in school assignment over time factor should also be considered for this group of students. Sophomores shouldn’t have to relive their freshman year a second time around.

- Revisit the walker plan for Seneca Valley remembering that there are three 4-lane roads surrounding this school. Adding more walkers escalates safety concerns. Northwest and Clarksburg each have one major road, Great Seneca Highway and Rt 355 respectively. There is no fence along Great Seneca Highway for Seneca Valley High
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School students. There are no speed cameras and there are no crossing guards. Let’s not let tragedy force us to make the necessary changes.

- Finally, reconsider the boundary line that splits Germantown Elementary School. This is one of the smallest schools in the county graduating 40-50 students each year. This would result in roughly 15-20 students articulating to Seneca Valley each year. Why split such a small group? The boundary line cuts through the backyards of neighbors. Consider keeping them together.

We cannot fix all the problems, in all the schools, at the same time, but we must start somewhere. Start with the Superintendent’s recommendation, Option 11A with variations.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Revonne Johnson
NAACP Parents Council