Good Evening, my name is Nathan Diehl, and I have been asked to speak on behalf of the Rocky Hill PTSA. I was elected president for this school year and it is my duty and honor to advocate for the school and community interests in all things MCPS.

Under Dr. Smith’s recommendation of option 11 he is proposing to divide these communities and if you approve it, the Board of Education will further distance these communities at a time in our country where the nation is divisive already.

I ask the board: what possible benefit to the district can it be to relocate students so far away from their home-base of operation, community and neighborhood friends? I would also ask Dr. Smith to clarify a statement, and I quote him taken from his recommendation report published on Oct 16th

"...One of my goals in developing my recommendation was to decrease the disparity in the FARMS population at the high schools. FARMS percentage is a strong indicator to evaluate poverty in schools. The level of poverty in a school correlates to academic achievement of students." Pg 15, pp.5 Superintendent’s Recommendation on the Boundary Study for the Clarksburg, Northwest, and Seneca Valley Clusters October 16, 2019

I believe it’s important to recognize that FARMS students are students first. How will moving a student to another school provide greater access to resources when resources can easily come to them? It would have put a tremendous burden on my family if I moved schools just because I was a FARMS kid just to balance out their demographics. Will teaching FARMS students next to non-FARMS students change the socioeconomic reality of these FARMS families? The proposal will not have a great effect of reducing FARMS rates significantly, again quoting the Superintendent recommendation from Oct 16th

"The FARMS rate would increase at Clarksburg High School from 27.5 percent to 28.5 percent, would decrease slightly at Northwest High School from 22.5 percent to 21.6 percent, and at Seneca Valley High School would decrease from 39.0 percent to 34.5 percent. Pg 14, pp.2 Superintendent’s Recommendation on the Boundary Study for the Clarksburg, Northwest, and Seneca Valley Clusters October 16, 2019

Rather than busing and moving kids around like chess pieces, resources can and should be re-allocated to support those particular groups in their home area. For example, the greatest disparity in FARMS comes at the Elementary level. We know that foundational learning is the most impactful on students, so give greater access to resources, more support, more funding to hire more classroom teachers, resource teachers, technology, provide family programming and family liaisons to help reduce the poverty these families are experiencing, not just to shuffle the kids around. Pay for Global Child Care for these students, increase the extracurriculars and pay teachers to sponsor them. Yes, I agree it looks good on paper to reduce the percentage of FARMS and balance out overall achievement rates, but that is manipulating an equation, not solving the actual problem.
Lastly, socially, middle school is a tumultuous time; a middle schooler's prefrontal cortex is going through mental pruning and cognitive realignment. Any consistency and structure is highly beneficial to students in their behavioral, academic and social development.

Also, in combination with hormones, puberty and new school scheduling (7 classes in MS versus 1 class in ES), it is tough to be a 6th, 7th and 8th grader! However, friendships and social circles formed in middle school which continue on into high school years and beyond provide the strong social network students rely on. Having steady friendships can often be the difference between a student who is successful and the student who struggles constantly for 7 years. With the already alarming rates of suicide amongst middle school-aged students, it is more important than ever to foster strong, healthy social relationships as a preventative to suicide and the well-being of mental health.

The Rocky Hill MS PTSA and community are unified in our promotion of Option 12. Although I have read the arguments from Dr. Smith, I know it is in your hands.

Nathan Diehl
President
Rocky Hill Middle School PTSA
Speaking on behalf of the Executive Board, the PTSA members, and Rocky Hill Cluster Community at-large