



November 9, 2021

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Board of Education, Montgomery County Public Schools

RE: Interim Superintendent's Recommendation: Bethesda/Somerset/Westbrook ES

Dear President Wolff and Members of the Board of Education:

This letter is submitted on behalf of the Chevy Chase Village Board of Managers, an incorporated municipality and community of 720 families within the Bethesda-Chevy Chase cluster. We appreciate the thoughtfulness and professionalism that the MCPS staff, Interim Superintendent, and the Board of Education have brought to the question of the Bethesda-Somerset-Westbrook ES boundaries. However, we share the serious concerns raised by our residents and by neighboring communities and we present below the basis for our **opposition** to the Interim Superintendent's October 15 recommendation.

Most importantly, the Board should not proceed with a decision while the District 3 Board seat representing these communities remains vacant. We do not believe that the Board should act on this matter that is so clearly contrary to community input while the affected District lacks representation.

Regarding the recommendation, first, Option 1 ignores the geography of Zone S3, which lies on the western edge of the Village. Zone S3 consists of about 135 homes and currently represents about half of the 30 or so families in the Village that attend Somerset ES. The bulk of Zone S3 is a half mile walk from Somerset ES, as compared to Westbrook, which is a 2 ½ mile drive. Zone S3 is currently served by a school bus route only because students must cross Wisconsin Avenue to get to Somerset. Arguably, were MCPS to provide a single crossing guard for Wisconsin Avenue, Zone S3 would be assigned as 'walkers' with no bus assignment. Option 1 threatens to further splinter our walkable small community into a 4th and more distant elementary school.

Second, the recommendation fails to recognize Somerset ES' declining enrollment and, therefore, the school's capacity to provide population relief to Bethesda ES. Not only is Somerset ES not projected to suffer capacity issues pursuant to MCPS staff's enrollment projections, but enrollment has declined by more than 90 students this year alone. Clearly, there is sufficient capacity for Zone S3 students to remain at Somerset ES, while absorbing some of the students currently assigned to Bethesda ES.

Third, considering the impact these boundary decisions will have on affected families at all three schools, it is important that the community's input is heeded. Surprisingly, the Interim Superintendent's recommendation contradicts the strong community preference for Option 4.

We greatly appreciate the complexity that the Board of Education must navigate in balancing issues like this. For the reasons outlined above, **we urge the Board of Education not to approve Option 1 as currently proposed and, at a minimum, remove Zone S3 from possible reassignment.**

Respectfully,

Elissa A. Leonard
Chair, Chevy Chase Village Board of Managers

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