

MHHS PTSA Position Statement on HCPSS Superintendent's Attendance Area Adjustment Plan dated August 20, 2019

In response to call for Public Input by HCPSS Board of Education

Public Testimony at BOE Hearing September 17, 2019

Written testimony due before November 20, 2019 4:30pm

Sept. 10, 2019

The Mt. Hebron High School (MHHS) Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) believes that high school students benefit academically, socially, and mentally from the consistency of attending the same school for all four years. Based on Policy 6010 and the Superintendent's own "driving priorities", there is no justification for redistricting Mt. Hebron High School anytime before HS#13 boundaries are finalized.

The MHHS PTSA understands that, at times, the HCPSS must utilize attendance area adjustments for populating a newly built school and has in the past also redistricted students due to overcrowding in existing buildings through this process. In regards to all area attendance adjustments, the MHHS PTSA holds the following positions:

1. The MHHS PTSA believes that **once a student begins at a high school in ninth grade, that student should never be moved** from that school by the Howard County Public School System.
2. **Consistency** in completing the high school program at the same school a student begins is **instrumental in success in academics and extracurricular activities** for children. Moving a student during critical high school years affects their career- and college-readiness in leadership positions and participation in student government, National Honor Societies, music programs, academic clubs, sports, and others. It also affects students' relationships with teachers and school counselors who are instrumental in providing support during the college preparation process throughout high school, as well as tracking our students' overall well-being.
3. Being forced to transfer schools is **detrimental to students' mental health** by removing their safety net and introducing unnecessary change and stress. We state that students are resilient. Students are resilient but they are resilient because of the community and

environment that surrounds them. A student's first and last line of defense may be their friends. This is especially true for our teens. While parents, teachers, and administrators always watch out for our children/students, it is the student's circle of friends that see the subtle yet important changes that occur. Therefore, it is our student's friends that are our children's most important line of defense. When our children are in trouble, it is usually the friend who notices first. It is the friend who knows she/he needs to reach out for help on behalf of another friend. The Howard County Public School System has the tools to quickly help students who may be at risk for making a life changing mistake, such as substance abuse, harm to self, and harm to others. If you pull apart the friend safety net, the consistency of checking in, the open and constant communication is fractured and there is a higher risk that we have removed the first, and many times the last, line of help for our students/children. We note, from the Howard County government website, "In Howard County, from 2014-2016, suicide was the number one cause of death for teens age 15-19." According to a DOH infographic, 1 in 4 high school students experienced sad or hopeless feelings; 1 in 6 high school students seriously considered attempting suicide; and 1 in 7 high school students made a plan about how they would attempt suicide.

<https://www.howardcountymd.gov/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=6nrdbJIH7JI%3d&tabid=1413&portalid=0>

4. **High School redistricting should be delayed until after the HS#13 attendance area has been determined.** Moving students in 2020 who may be reassigned in 2023 when HS#13 opens is unnecessarily disruptive when Policy 6010 advises HCPSS "make every attempt to not move a student more than once...every five years".
5. **Redistricting, if necessary, should be done in such a way as to impact the fewest number of families necessary to achieve the desired outcome.** For example, students at an overcrowded school should be assigned to an underutilized school without the domino effect of impacting schools in between.
6. **All families of students living in polygons to be redistricted at any school level should be given, at a minimum, notification of an upcoming attendance area change two years prior to the change occurring.**
7. **Students assigned to a new school further away may experience issues with transportation which may affect their participation in after-school activities and clubs, and parents may find it more difficult to make trips to school.** Transportation issues could have a negative effect on family engagement in the new school, and may cause students further stress and isolation. It will disproportionately affect families who don't have access to personal vehicles and adequate public transportation options. Because there is no Transportation plan accompanying the Superintendent's plan, we don't have data on all the ways the transferred students will be impacted.

Moving students out of Mt. Hebron does not align with the goals set forward in the Superintendent’s Attendance Area Adjustment Plan and is, in fact, detrimental to equity at Mt. Hebron High School. Specific to Mt. Hebron High School, the MHHS PTSA would like to address each of the “driving priorities” for the Superintendent’s Plan.

1. “Balance capacity utilization among schools throughout HCPSS, cost effectively.” Proposal: The Superintendent’s Plan proposes moving 167 students out of Mt. Hebron without adding any additional students. (p.12). **PTSA position: There is no way to determine if redistricting at the HS level is in line with county goals until the HS#13 attendance area is finalized. In addition, it is not cost effective to spend funds bussing students who are currently walkers, and substantially increasing transportation costs for others.**
 - a. Current Capacity: Mt. Hebron is successfully serving its student body with adequate classroom and shared spaces, like the cafeteria. Administrators, parents, and students are NOT complaining about overcrowding at Mt. Hebron. Mt. Hebron is currently at 117% utilization based on a capacity of 1400, which is actually 1560 if the 5 long-term relocatable classrooms are taken into account. This figure also does not take into consideration the students who attend classes at ARL for 2 periods in the morning or 2 periods in the afternoon, students taking classes at HCC, and students who leave after 4 periods for work study.
 - b. Future Capacity: According to the Superintendent’s presentation on the possible boundaries of HS#13, almost half of Mt. Hebron’s polygons have a fair chance of being impacted by the opening of HS#13. At this point it is impossible to predict what the utilization in MHHS will be in 2024-25 year until after these boundaries have been finalized.
 - c. Cost Effectiveness: Transportation is negatively impacted in these three areas: increased costs, inequity in participation in after school activities, and increased danger. It is fiscally irresponsible to substantially increase costs by bussing students who are currently walkers to their high school, and more than tripling transportation time for others. Students assigned to a new school further away may experience issues with transportation which will create a huge inequity in their participation in after-school activities, clubs, tutoring, and parental participation. Longer travel distances and inequitable access to transportation methods would have a negative effect on family engagement in the new school, and may cause students further stress and isolation. It will disproportionately affect families who don’t have access to personal vehicles and adequate public transportation options. Because there is no Transportation plan accompanying the Superintendent’s plan, we don’t have data on all the ways the transferred students will be impacted.

Finally, the Superintendent's Plan contributes to sending young drivers, parents, and additional busses down an already dangerous and congested road, U.S. 99. Quoting an article in the Baltimore Sun from Feb. 2018, The County's Department of Transportation "is in the first stages of an investigation into congestion and safety issues along roughly 6 miles between Marriottsville Road and U.S. 29". "A State Highway spokeswoman said the agency is working with the county on the investigation, sharing its traffic accident data with department for analysis".

<https://www.baltimoresun.com/maryland/howard/ph-ho-cf-md-99-0215-story.html>

Since the approval of this statement, the aforementioned report was released containing the content referenced above.

<https://hocogis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=ca4120d25e6449e399598ef30b4ffc41&fbclid=IwAR0liUB0yd8PDCwWzGGL3xsqyt-1yDH7CUIRS99XohrndkCHOdW3gBo1o9w>

2. "Advance equity by addressing the distribution of students participating in the Free and Reduced-price meals program (FARMS) program across schools to the extent feasible." **PTSA position: The Superintendent's Plan contradicts the stated goal by decreasing the FARMS numbers at Mt. Hebron HS from 16% to 14%.**
 - a. See "Utilization and FARM - Middle & High School", p. 14.
3. Plan ahead for the High School #13 redistricting by minimizing double moves as much as possible. **PTSA position: Students being moved through the Superintendent's Plan in 2020 may be moved needlessly if the opening of HS#13 creates additional capacity at Mt. Hebron.**
 - a. According to a map in the Superintendent's power point presentation ("New High School #13 Consideration"), almost half of Mt. Hebron's polygons have a fair chance of being impacted (which is not defined) by the opening of HS#13 in 2023. If additional capacity is created at Mt. Hebron by reassigning students from the polygons indicated, then the students who moved in 2020 would have been moved needlessly.
 - b. Turf Valley, which feeds Marriotts Ridge High School, is slated to add 917 new residences leading to 5 year projected overcrowding at Marriotts Ridge. If Mt. Hebron students are moved to Marriotts Ridge in 2020, they may end up in a school more overcrowded than Mt. Hebron ever was. We feel HCPSS should plan ahead for HS#13 by focusing on long-range enrollment projections at all high schools to minimize needless disruptions.

Again, moving students out of Mt. Hebron does not align with the goals set forward in the Superintendent's Attendance Area Adjustment Plan (the Superintendent's Plan) and is, in fact, detrimental to equity in the number of FARMS students at Mt. Hebron High School, cost-ineffective due to expanded transportation costs, and potentially disruptive as HS#13 may create additional capacity at Mt. Hebron.

According to HCPSS Policy 6010, the Board, Superintendent/Designee and the AAC will consider the impact of three factors in the review or development of any school attendance area adjustment plan: Facility Utilization, Community Stability, and Demographic Characteristics of Student Population. There is no justification for redistricting Mt. Hebron HS when considering the factors of Policy 6010. Mt. Hebron's capacity is successfully serving its student body without complaint of overcrowding, this plan divides an existing, contiguous community-centered neighborhood, and FARMS numbers actually DECREASE under this plan. The PTSA would like to address how the Superintendent's Plan impacts the factors of policy 6010 at MHHS.

1. **Facility Utilization.**

- a. Relocatables and the reconfiguring of gathering spaces have allowed Mt. Hebron's current population of 1675 students to flourish and thrive. There have been no reports of Mt. Hebron administrators, parents, or students complaining about overcrowding. We request that you not fix something that isn't broken. In fact, by decreasing Mt. Hebron's - or any Howard County high school's - utilization to under 115%, you open that school's area up to more immediate residential development which renews the cycle of more students and more overcapacity schools. For middle schools that figure is a lower 110%, and elementary schools utilization lower yet at 105%. There is an argument to be made that high school utilization should be kept at 115% or higher to slow down additional residential development until new school capacity can be created where it's needed.
- b. Long-range enrollment is impossible to predict with the data provided in the plan. With what looks like almost half of Mt. Hebron's polygons having a "Fair" chance of being impacted by the opening of HS#13 (according to the Superintendent's powerpoint slide), we cannot use HCPSS current 5-yr projection data with any confidence.
- c. The fiscally responsible action would be to allow students to attend the school closest to them, especially students deemed "walkers," and not accrue additional transportation costs.
- d. Of the 82 students in polygon 159, many are walkers to Mt. Hebron who will have to be bussed to Marriotts Ridge. We also know the comparative distances for traveling

between Mt. Hebron HS and Marriotts Ridge HS for polygons 159 and 1159, and between Mt. Hebron HS and Centennial HS for polygons 308, 1308 and 2308. As you can see from the table below, the distance students will be required to travel to Marriotts Ridge and Centennial from their respective polygons is about double for students in polygons 308, 1308, and 2308, and more than 6 times the distance for students in polygons 159 and 1159 as that of traveling to Mt. Hebron. That additional travel distance means more money from the HCPSS budget for bussing. The figures below are for driving in a personal vehicle during typical morning school time, about 20 minutes before the morning bell. We can assume bus rides will take approximately three times longer than they do now.

	Mt. Hebron HS	Marriotts Ridge HS	Centennial HS
Polygons	Distance to	Distance to	Distance to
159, 1159	1.5 miles	9.3 miles	NA
308, 1308, 2308	3.0 miles	NA	5.6 miles

2. Community Stability

- a. In the case of polygons 159 and 1159, the Superintendent's Plan divides an existing, contiguous, community-centered neighborhood - Valley Mede - in half, destabilizing the neighborhood.
- b. Based on the Superintendent's power point slide "New High School #13 Consideration," it appears that close to half of the Mt. Hebron polygons have a fair chance of being impacted by the opening of HS#13. Based on this uncertainty, it is unnecessarily disruptive to move students next year when that move may be reversed only three years later.

3. Demographic Characteristics of Student Population. Mt. Hebron demographics according to the statistics provided in the Superintendent's Plan show that moving Mt. Hebron students out does not serve the Plan's stated goals.

- a. The Plan has no impact on cultural/ethnic characteristics at Mt. Hebron. These figures are pulled from charts in the Superintendent's Plan.

Amer. Indian or Alaska Native		Asian		Black or African American		Nat Hawaii or other Pacific Islander		Hispanic		Two or More		White	
Base	Propose	Base	Propose	Base	Propose	Base	Propose	Base	Propose	Base	Propose	Base	Propose
<=5%	<=5%	31%	32%	15%	13%	<=5%	<=5%	8%	8%	<=5%	<=5%	42%	41%

<=5%	20%	24%	<=5%	10%	6%	39%
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b. FARMS percentages actually decrease at Mt. Hebron from 16% to 14% (Superintendent's Plan p. 14).

c. Academically, the Superintendent's Plan says PSAT-Read will increase 1% and PSAT-Math 3%. (Superintendent's Plan, p. 22). While positive, those small increments are not worth disrupting 167 students.

d. EL participation remains unchanged at <=5% (Superintendent's Plan, p. 24).

In Conclusion

The Mt. Hebron High School (MHHS) Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) believes that high school students benefit academically, socially, and mentally from the consistency of attending the same school for all four years. Based on Policy 6010 and the Superintendent's own "driving priorities", there is no justification for redistricting Mt. Hebron High School anytime before HS#13 boundaries are finalized. We are concerned that the public does not have enough time or information to adequately respond to the Superintendent's Plan. The Superintendent's Plan did not come with an accompanying Transportation Study, Social Impact Study or studies on the Legal Impact or Budget Impact. This information is necessary to make the best redistricting decision in the short time frame allowed between now and November 21.

To reiterate, the Mt. Hebron High School PTSA believes that:

1. **Once a student begins at a high school in ninth grade, they should never be moved** from that school by the Howard County Public School System.
2. **Consistency** in completing the high school program at the same school a student begins is **instrumental in success in academics and extracurricular activities** for children.
3. Being forced to transfer schools may be **detrimental to students' mental health** by introducing unnecessary change and stress.
4. High School redistricting should be **delayed until after the HS#13 attendance area has been determined.**

5. Redistricting, if necessary, should be done in such a way as to **impact the fewest number of families** necessary to achieve the desired outcome.
6. All families of students living in polygons to be redistricted at any school level should be given, at a minimum, **notification of an upcoming attendance area change two years prior to the change** occurring.
7. **Transportation is not cost-effective in the Superintendent's Plan, and the transportation-related effects of redistricting will negatively affect student and family engagement in their new, further schools, plus student and family safety.**
More information is needed to fully explore the transportation expense, limitations, expectations, alternatives, and gaps in service in moving the students involved in redistricting.