

BCPS High School Capacity Study Email Log: 07/27/18 through 08/03/18

July 28, 2018, 1348 hours

T. Kartye

It strikes me that starting this conversation with a focus on school capacity is a missed opportunity to think more holistically about how BCPS can ensure every child that graduates is prepared for a job or college. Any of the scenarios presented will probably achieve the goal: a seat for every student. But that seat won't matter if it means that many students are still not getting a quality education.

If BCPS is going to seriously entertain dramatic expenditures and steps that will impact the entire system (and still not make everyone happy) why not start with a goal of making sure every high school in BCPS is considered high quality? Improving educational outcomes for students is not a simple equation that will be solved with magnet schools. While capacity may be an immediate and painful issue, it's also the easier nut to crack with the least reward. BCPS students and their families will be better off in the long run if we start with a focus on improving quality in every BCPS high school.

July 28, 2018, 1935 hours

L. Houliaris

After attending a public information session and reviewing the scenarios, I would like to suggest an alternate option – building 3 or 4 entirely brand new schools on new land (not existing locations) in order to ameliorate the potential overcrowding issues. Though it may cost slightly more money, I think it will offer a longer-term solution, beyond 10 years. Thank you! Laura

July 29, 2018, 2102 hours

A. DeLeo

I've tried to fill out the survey but answering the questions feels like a complicated trap. I find the survey to be vague and a little disingenuous since it is difficult to separate the issues of boundary changes, filling all local vacant seats in Catonsville, and school quality.

I think we should pay the price to get all BCPS students a quality education. Regarding Catonsville specifically, I think we should invest the resources needed to make Woodlawn High School a desirable place to send our students. Increase staff as needed, decrease ratios of students to teachers, and offer high quality programs. I am willing to pay higher taxes to make sure a high quality education is available to everyone.

Amanda DeLeo

July 29, 2018, 2102 hours

S. Carney

I am a Towson resident, and my daughters will attend Towson High School beginning in the fall. I attended the public information session at Carver. Overall, I am disappointed with both the process and the scenarios, and am left with more questions than answers.

1- Was the Towson High School site feasibility study incorporated in this process? If not, why not? If yes, when will the community be informed of the findings of the site feasibility study?

2- Why do all scenarios but one plan for a 2000-seat Towson High School, when it is located on the smallest site of all BCPS high schools, with no identifiable land for expansion?

3- Why does the survey not include any identifiers, or take precautions to prevent people from taking it numerous times? The survey in its current form can be taken repeatedly by anyone (and I know that it has, as people have told me they have done so), therefore invalidating the results.

4- Has BCPS considered using this process of evaluating capacity in all high schools as an opportunity to examine improving educational equity across the district? Don't we want to do right by ALL of our students? If our focus was on making every school a 7/10 (or better, to use numbers I've seen referenced frequently in these public comments), then students, families, and community members would feel more confident in each school option and there may be less fear or resistance to change. The current overcrowding presents an opportunity to improve all schools and outcomes for all students.

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July 30, 2018, 1012 hours

S. Trepetin

In the day of technology, it saddens me that amongst the options on the table to resolve the looming issue of School crowding in the high schools, a rigorous, aggressive, and paradigm shifting blueprint is not on the list.

BCPS could launch a pioneering program, with the understanding from parents and student participants alike, that this is an organic educational experiment and as such, could and would change according to regular feedback from parties involved as well as from an oversight panel, all with the intention to “course correct” as we move further into this new way, this new wave of learning.

It would be an online learning program where qualified students (this would be determined by application and interview process) would be able to take the majority of their courses from a remote location (home, public library, purpose built “technology center” for use by BCPS students exclusively (this would be much less to build out than adding more schools or classrooms to the existing system)), yet it would incorporate one or two days of mandatory attendance during the week to their designated high school, too. This way, physical socializing is not eliminated and no student is left alone and isolated by this new way of learning. These “in-school/on-site” days could be used to address questions about topics covered over the past lessons, or perhaps even simply as a day to be in community and hold discussions more directly targeted towards what is of concern or ponderance to the students in the room - a weekly forum, if you will, to allow these young adults to very honestly express themselves in a safe space, amongst peers, without judgment, in order to nurture their minds and encourage their thinking about any of the topics that come up in this time together.

I find that, for the most part, our children nowadays are so consumed with both virtual worlds (computer games and communications) and micro-managed time (many times over-scheduling, especially as young kids- gymnastics, art class, soccer, tennis, tutoring, etc.) by well-intentioned adults, and less and less time is left available for the lost art of face to face/heart to heart conversation, not to mention the exquisite, delicious practice of stillness and “quiet time”. Incorporating one day a week at school for just such purposes may actually provide integral lessons at such a perfect age, prior to launching these young adults out into a world of what may appear as chaotic and overstimulating. After 3 or 4 days of online learning from remote locations, gathering together for questions and contemplation may afford these “new citizens on the scene” an arsenal of tools for coping, a set of practices and exercises to remain balanced (or return to balance, should the day throw you a curveball), and ultimately, optimally, perhaps even a healthy sense of self.

It is a shame that all of the adults involved in this problem solving group are not thinking towards a new world, a new way, and are clearly stuck in old ways of thinking. As Einstein proposed, “we can’t solve problems by using the same thinking we used when we created them.”

Just my thoughts on the matter. Sincerely, Sonia Trepetin

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July 30, 2018, 1526 hours

C. Kamt

Dear Mr. Quirk,

My name is Christine Kamt and I live in the Catonsville Heights neighborhood. I am writing to you today with many concerns after attending the gallery walks regarding the High School Capacity Study run by BCPS and SAGE Policy group.

My first concern is that the condition of the high schools like Lansdowne were not taken into account when the seen scenarios were presented. This is a huge oversight and a disservice to the Lansdowne community. If Lansdowne had a new school, which is a necessity, it would most likely filter off students now attending Catonsville High on waivers.

Several of the other scenarios presented suggested redistricting Catonsville High students to Woodlawn High. On paper, this scenario seems appealing--it looks cost effective to simply adjust the boundaries and take students from an overcrowded school to an underutilized one, especially to people from outside of these service areas. However, in reality this is a non-solution with only negative consequences.

The reason Woodlawn High is underutilized is because the families living in that catchment area do not send their children there. The families are there, the seven elementary schools that feed into Woodlawn High have robust attendance. Catonsville High only has four elementary schools that go on to attend there. Woodlawn is a great community that unfortunately, has a high school with serious safety and academic issues, and the majority of families zoned for the school instead send their children to magnet school programs, private schools, homeschool, or request waivers in order to avoid their children having to attend Woodlawn High.

The safety and academic issues at Woodlawn High will not disappear if the lines for the school are redrawn. What will happen is the Catonsville families who are redistricted will employ the same tactics to pull their kids out of the school. No parent wants to send their child to a school that is dangerous. Woodlawn High regularly goes on lockdown on account of student fights, students threatening each other with knives or pepper spray. Even sadder, a student was stabbed on the tennis courts while at school last school year. I can't blame parents for not supporting this school if they are zoned to it.

What BCPS needs to do is to put in the hard work to make Woodlawn safe so that it will attract more students and so that its own community will support it. All students deserve a quality public education, no matter their zip code. Moving more students to Woodlawn will not actually fill its seats. All families with access to other options will use them. This will only continue to perpetuate the inequity already taking place at the school, now it would effect even more students in a larger area.

Additionally, I found it very disturbing at the gallery walk that many of the guiding considerations of BCPS' Rule 1280 (III.A.3) are being ignored. These are BCPS' own policies regarding boundary changes, yet they seem to be cherry picking considerations for capacity only instead of taking a holistic approach. Included in the overlooked considerations are many reasons supporting neighborhoods like Catonsville Heights remaining districted to Catonsville High.

These include:

- a. Maintaining the continuity of neighborhoods
- b. Maintaining or increasing the diversity among schools to reflect the diversity of the region and the school system.
- c. The impact of transportation and pedestrian patterns on students
- d. Minimize the number of times any individual students are reassigned and
- e. Location of feeder school boundaries and continuity of feeder patterns.

Catonsville Heights, as well as the neighborhoods south along the route 40 corridor, constitute the lion's share of all diversity, minority student enrollment and FARMS, in the Catonsville catchment area. Redistricting any of these neighborhoods to Woodlawn would decrease the diversity at Catonsville.

It would also mean that our children would be bussed across 40, something which was discussed at the Southwest Elementary Boundary Change process a few years ago, namely with a large contingent of Johnnycake Elementary students who lived just north of 40 being bussed to Westchester Elementary. Many of the parents brought up safety concerns and refused to be bussed out of their own community, electing instead to remain overcrowded. Thankfully, BCPS listened and honored their request to stay and be educated in their own neighborhoods, in their own community instead of being forcefully moved against their will.

This also ties in with maintaining neighborhood continuity and feeder patterns. Like the students at Johnnycake, if my neighborhood were to be redistricted, my children would attend Hillcrest Elementary, Catonsville Middle, then be among a handful of students to attend Woodlawn High. Essentially, they would lose their entire peer group at the most crucial point in their successful social and emotional development. This is the age when your friends become more important, and they begin to spend more time with them rather than their families. It is imperative that they do not lose their social group and that their peers are a consistent and positive support to them as they navigate their new identities and practice growing their social skills. It would be devastating for our children to have to start all over again socially and alone at a brand new school.

In sum, redistricting Catonsville students to Woodlawn is a non-solution that will only cause further harm. I'm asking your office to intercede on our communities' behalf so that the rest of the county, who may be lured by what seems to be an easy solution, realize that boundary changes will not fill capacity at Woodlawn High. Indeed, it will just disproportionately affect the families in both of our communities who have no other option, instead of rebuilding Woodlawn High so that its community will support it.

Sincerely, Christine Kamt

BCPS High School Capacity Study Email Log: 07/27/18 through 08/03/18

July 31, 2018, 1311 hours

K. Wilson

Good afternoon. I would like the school system to consider all of the available space and resources in the Catonsville area, prior to considering redistricting our of the geographic area/renovation/additions. Currently, there is space to accommodate all students that live in the Catonsville area, without redistricting students to a school that is not geographically close, and would result in increased bussing. The school system should consider the available space at Woodlawn High School, Catonsville High School, Western Technical High School, and Catonsville Alternative School. The programs that are located at Western Technical High School and Catonsville Alternative School are programs that do not need to be specifically offered in those locations. Would it be possible to continue these programs at different locations, and make these traditional high schools instead, or specially programs for Catonsville High School students. One example would be to move the magnet program from Western Technical High School to Woodlawn high school. This should bring Woodlawn High School close to capacity. This would open seats at the location of Western Technical School and make close to 1,000 seats available to relieve overcrowding at Catonsville High School and potentially Lansdowne High School. The location of the school is also close in proximity to both Catonsville High School as well as Lansdowne High School. Another option would be to create a specialized program at Catonsville Alternative School. The school is in very close proximity to CCBC. This is a wonderful opportunity for the school to work with CCBC on a special program specific to Catonsville high school in which students attend CCBC and potentially achieve and associates degree, similar to the early college program at Woodlawn High School. The programs currently offered at Catonsville Alternative School could potentially be offered at Woodlawn High School. These programs would use all currently available seats in the area and would eliminate the need to redistrict students from their currently zoned schools to a school that is not geographically close and only move programs that are not location specific. Thank you for your consideration.

July 31, 2018, 1459 hours

D. Smith

Scenario 5 is inequitable. All new construction takes place in the eastern side of the district. Dave Smith