



www.capa-hc.org

**Testimony
Regarding Superintendent's
Proposed Attendance Area Adjustment**

**On Behalf of
Chinese American Parent Association of Howard County**

Before the HCPSS Board of Education

Distinguished HCPSS Board of Education Members,

This letter is written on behalf of over 600 registered members of the Chinese American Parent Association of Howard County (CAPA).

CAPA, while fully supporting the goal of diversity, equity and inclusion, and improving the academic performance of all Howard County students, strongly opposes superintendent's proposed attendance area adjustment plan, for the following reasons.

1. The plan is ineffective.

- a. The plan does not effectively solve the overcrowding issue. Based on superintendent's report, the number of overcrowded elementary schools changes from 11 to 9, number of overcrowded middle schools stay the same, and overcrowded high school decreases from 5 to 2 with 5 additional schools on the borderline at or close to 110% capacity as showed on page 14 of the report. While it improves the situation, it is not effective and efficient, given that 7,396 students would be impacted.
- b. The report does not provide substantial evidence that balancing FARM students will improve equity in HCPSS. The current published studies on the relationship between economic diversity and academic performance only present mixed conclusions at best. Furthermore, the majority of these studies focus on disparity between DIFFERENT school districts, not longitudinal achievement data on individual students. These results cannot be readily applied to Howard County, which has a unified school district with high mobility among the schools with regard to funding, teachers, and administrative personnel. Therefore, it is far from clear that “balancing” the FARM student ratio will help the disadvantaged students. At a minimum, a pilot study should be conducted before making a decision that would disrupt the lives of 7396 students and their families in such a large scale social experiment.

2. The plan is costly.

- a. The students and families will pay a high price for this plan in terms of their emotional and physical well being. Deviating from the principle that students go to the nearest school will make our kids spend more precious time on buses, time that can and should be used for sleeping and extracurricular activities. A longer commute also makes joining school activities such as music and sports more difficult for students and families. Bussing students out of the already under-populated schools (such as River Hill High School, Wilde Lake High School, and Clarksville Middle School) is even more counterproductive. Kids should not be sacrificed for our political and social aspirations.

b. This plan will cause a tremendous increase in transportation costs, given that many students will be bused to schools farther away. This is especially troubling when we have a projected shortfall of about \$60 million for the FY 2021 operating budget and a \$37 million budget deficit in health care. Unfortunately, so far, Dr. Martirano has not provided a projected cost increase caused by this plan. Last year, the Board of Education decided that the transportation costs were too high to support opening high schools at a later time, which is a proven way to improve student performance and health since it gives them more time to sleep in the morning. Now, this boundary adjustment plan will undoubtedly increase transportation costs tremendously to achieve the opposite effect—many kids will be even more sleep-deprived. We urge the Board of Education to set their priorities in the right direction and serve the best interests of our children by carefully considering the financial consequences of this plan and allocating school funding in the right place.

3. **There are better alternatives to promote opportunities for economically disadvantaged students.** HCPSS could make more resources (funding and teachers) available to underprivileged schools to address their needs. Inter-school activities (sports and academic events) can be held to promote student interactions and integration. Community resources are available and should be fully utilized. For example, CAPA runs several countywide programs to provide free tutoring and other services to support students academically and socially who need them the most no matter which schools they are in. These programs fully leveraged the resources and support from the whole community and therefore operate in a cost-effective manner. These and other less intrusive tools should be considered first, before resorting to using disruptive boundary adjustments to address a social issue.

To include as many people as possible in this process, especially to include the hard-to-reach population, CAPA conducted a survey among our members. A statistical summary and un-edited narratives are attached as part of our testimony. Please be advised, the statement above serves as CAPA's official position on superintendent's proposal on attendance area adjustment. CAPA member's individual opinions do NOT necessarily reflect CAPA's position as an organization. Nevertheless, we include these opinions to help the school board hear from the population that they are unable to reach otherwise and who was, unfortunately, not included in any part of the process of the creation of superintendent's proposal.