

Planning for Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster Elementary Schools

Background

The purpose of this supplement to the Superintendent’s Recommended FY 2010 Capital Budget and Amendments to the FY 2009–2014 Capital Improvements Program (CIP) is to identify elementary school facility planning issues in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster and outline future plans to review school assignments and articulation patterns for the paired schools in the cluster.

On July 29, 2008, the superintendent of schools transmitted a memorandum to Board of Education members that addressed school assignments for students attending Bethesda Elementary School. In particular, the memorandum clarified the assignment of the students residing in the East Bethesda community (east of Wisconsin Avenue) in Bethesda, Maryland, and in Paddington Square apartments at 8800 Lanier Drive, Silver Spring, Maryland. These students are assigned to Rosemary Hills Elementary School for Grades K–2 and to Bethesda Elementary School for Grades 3–5. In the past, families in these communities were part of an informal agreement with the school system which permitted children in Grades K–2 to attend Bethesda Elementary School through the school transfer process if space was available in the applicable grade level. If there were more requests than available seats, a lottery was to be held. The informal agreement began in 2000.

Unfortunately, the eight-year-old informal agreement was interpreted in different ways, leading to varying expectations. For example, an expectation developed that siblings of students who previously transferred from the East Bethesda or Paddington Square communities into Bethesda Elementary School for kindergarten, or students who simply had siblings in Grades 3–5 at Bethesda Elementary School, were entitled to enroll in the school for Grades K–2. The flexible transfer conditions that the informal agreement allowed have become a source of increased enrollment at the school and contention in the community. Bethesda Elementary School has four relocatables on site this school year.

The July 29, 2008, memorandum directed staff to cease use of the informal agreement and to enforce the existing boundaries and assignment patterns. The memorandum indicated that in the future, the Board-adopted Student Transfer Policy would be followed in this area, as it is throughout the county. This policy stipulates that transfer requests from the East Bethesda and Paddington Square communities to Bethesda Elementary School for Grades K–2, will be granted based on hardship or for rising kindergarten

students who have an older sibling in Grade 1 or Grade 2 at the school. In addition, the memorandum indicated that staff would review student assignments in this area in the future. Subsequently, community representatives from the East Bethesda area have requested further clarification on assignment options and future planning activities.

Fall Enrollment and Facility Space Issues

This fall, Montgomery County Public Schools enrollment is substantially greater than forecasted, especially at elementary schools. Enrollment increases in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster elementary schools were especially significant. Enrollment is over projection at the following cluster schools: Bethesda Elementary School (+51), Chevy Chase Elementary School (+20), North Chevy Chase Elementary School (+18), Rosemary Hills Elementary School (+17), and Somerset Elementary School (+29). In many of these schools, the greatest amount of increase occurred in kindergarten enrollment.

Due to enrollment increases in elementary schools in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster, and the lack of adequate capacity to accommodate this enrollment, the superintendent of schools is recommending that capacity studies be conducted for Bethesda, Chevy Chase, North Chevy Chase, and Rosemary Hills elementary schools. These capacity studies, recommended for FY 2010, will determine the feasibility of additions at each of these schools, including determination of the maximum number of classrooms that can be added at each school. Subsequent to this determination, a schedule for reviewing school assignments and programming addition projects will be developed.

One other consideration for the capacity studies and future review of student assignments is the current articulation of some students who attend Bethesda Elementary School to Thomas W. Pyle Middle School and Walt Whitman High School. These students reside in the western portion of the Bethesda Elementary School service area, west of Maple Ridge Road and Glenbrook Road. The Bradley Hills Elementary School service area is adjacent to this area. In order to keep options open for possible future school assignment changes, the feasibility study that is currently being conducted for an addition at Bradley Hills Elementary School will be expanded to determine if additional classrooms could be built to accommodate students from the western portion of the Bethesda Elementary School service area. The option of reassigning this area to Bradley Hills Elementary School would provide straight articulation for these students to Thomas W. Pyle Middle School and help address overutilization at Bethesda Elementary School.

In regard to other elementary schools in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster, facility plans in place, or recommended, will address space shortages. At Rock Creek Forest Elementary School, space deficits will be addressed during the school's modernization, scheduled for completion in January 2015. At Westbrook Elementary School, a feasibility study is recommended for FY 2010 for a classroom addition to address space shortages at the school. At Somerset Elementary School, projected space shortages are less severe than at other schools, and do not justify completing the school's master planned addition at this time.

Commitment to Paired Schools

The development of school pairings in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster has a long and complex history. At this point in time, it can safely be said that the pairings that exist between Rosemary Hills Elementary School and Chevy Chase and North Chevy Chase elementary schools are successful and widely supported in the communities assigned to these schools. At the same time, the articulation pattern of portions of the Bethesda Elementary School community to Rosemary Hills Elementary School for Grades K–2, and then to Bethesda Elementary School for Grades 3–5, has been a longstanding source of concern.

It is important to note that there is no intention to end the pairings of Rosemary Hills Elementary School and Chevy Chase and North Chevy Chase elementary schools through planning activities outlined in this supplement. On the other hand, when student assignments are reviewed in the future for Bethesda Elementary School, consideration must be given to providing a consistent assignment for all students within the Bethesda Elementary School service area and ending the split articulations that exist today for many of these students and addressing the split articulation to two middle schools that exists today for Bethesda Elementary School students.

Articulation Options for Students Assigned to Rosemary Hills Elementary School

The articulation options available to students who attend Rosemary Hills Elementary School for Grades K–2 were not specifically the focus of the July 29, 2008, memorandum and merit clarification.

Every geographic area in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster paired schools has a school assignment that depends on the grade level of the student. For example, there is one, noncontiguous area wherein students are assigned to Rosemary Hills Elementary School for Grades K–2 and Chevy Chase Elementary School for Grades 3–6. The same is true for the pairing of Rosemary Hills Elementary School and North Chevy Chase Elementary School, and for the partial pairing of Rosemary Hills Elementary School and Bethesda Elementary School. Information on these assignments is provided online on the MCPS website and through the school system’s boundary information line when parents call in and provide a specific address. The assignments also are identified in school boundary map books.

In addition to the geographic assignments described above, any student attending Rosemary Hills Elementary School has a choice of articulation to the assigned paired school or to another of the paired schools in the cluster. In other words, at the completion of Grade 2 at Rosemary Hills Elementary School, families of these students may select Bethesda, Chevy Chase, or North Chevy Chase elementary schools for continuation of their children’s elementary school years. This is a longstanding option that was initiated on March 1, 1983, when the Board of Education acted to establish the school pairings.

The option for Rosemary Hills Elementary School students to articulate to any one of the three paired schools will continue to be in effect. However, the future school assignment

review will need to consider this practice, along with other possible boundary reassignments and articulation changes.

Summary and Next Steps

The superintendent of schools' interest in a review of school assignments in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase paired schools was initiated by a combination of the overutilization of these schools and unusual articulation patterns present in the Bethesda Elementary School service area. This fall's higher than expected enrollment in the paired schools provides further impetus to undertake capacity studies for these schools and for Bradley Hills Elementary School. The recommended capacity studies are a necessary prerequisite to reviewing school assignments and articulation patterns in the future.

Reviewing school assignments and articulation patterns, and providing additional elementary school capacity, will take a number of years to accomplish. In the meantime, current school assignments and articulation patterns will continue. To be clear, the school assignments for students from the East Bethesda and Paddington Square communities will continue to be Rosemary Hills Elementary School for Grades K–2 and Bethesda Elementary School for Grades 3–5. As indicated in the July 29, 2008, memorandum, the previous informal agreement that allowed Grades K–2 students from these communities to obtain transfers to Bethesda Elementary School—if there was space in the school's applicable grade level—is no longer available. In the future these transfer requests will be evaluated in adherence to the Board of Education Student Transfer Policy as it is administered throughout the county. In addition, consistent with the options open to all students who attend Rosemary Hills Elementary School, students from this area may select Bethesda, Chevy Chase, or North Chevy Chase elementary schools at the completion of Grade 2.

The unique planning issues in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase paired elementary schools will require careful long-range planning. Following the recommended capacity studies in FY 2010, a schedule for student assignment reviews and the programming of addition projects will be developed. Preserving the benefits of paired schools in this cluster, while addressing aspects of the pairings that unduly impact a few communities, will be an objective. Providing adequate capacity to accommodate projected enrollment will be an equally important objective.

[This supplement also is available on the Montgomery County Public Schools website at:](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/planning/CIPMaster_Current.htm)

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