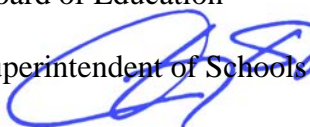


Office of the Superintendent of Schools
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

July 29, 2008

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jerry D. Weast, Superintendent of Schools 

Subject: East Bethesda Student Assignments

The purpose of this memorandum is to clarify the elementary school assignments for students residing in the East Bethesda community as we go forward. Students from East Bethesda have been assigned to Rosemary Hills Elementary School for Grades K–2 as the result of Board action on March 2, 1983, and to Bethesda Elementary School for Grades 3–5 as the result of Board action on June 12, 1986. This means that for articulation purposes, students from one family attending Grades K–2 at Rosemary Hills School and Grades 3–5 at Bethesda Elementary School are, in essence, considered to be in the same school on the same campus (similar to other pairings, such as Montgomery Knolls and Pine Crest elementary schools). Questions have arisen this year regarding how the Student Transfer Policy, JEE, relates to this school pairing, which is unique because Bethesda Elementary School also has Grades K–2.

In 2000, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) staff met with representatives of the East Bethesda community and reached an understanding about the way in which the Student Transfer Policy would operate for students living in the East Bethesda community. The understanding was intended to accommodate those families in the community who preferred a Grades K–5 articulation pattern solely at Bethesda Elementary School. It was agreed that if seats were available in the kindergarten classes at Bethesda Elementary School, East Bethesda families who requested a transfer would be given approval. The availability of space in the kindergarten classes was the only criterion considered in this accommodation, and if there were more requests than there were seats available, it was agreed that a lottery would be held and students would be chosen randomly. No other changes or exceptions in the Board-mandated assignment pattern were made as a part of this accommodation.

It is obvious from the number of transfer appeals received this year from East Bethesda residents that there are different perceptions about what the “understanding” means. The expectation that there is an entitlement for siblings to enroll at Bethesda Elementary School, not dependent on space, has evolved among some members of the East Bethesda community. Moreover, the expectation for automatic transfer approval of siblings of those who accessed Grades K–2 at Bethesda Elementary School through this accommodation has now been expanded to encompass younger siblings of students who are assigned to attend Bethesda Elementary School in

Grades 3–5 as the result of Board-mandated articulation pattern. The expanding interpretation of automatic approval of siblings, regardless of the Board’s student assignment patterns and regardless of space, would contribute to the overenrollment problem at Bethesda Elementary School.

The eight-year-old “agreement” is now a source of contention rather than accommodation. What began as an “understanding” between the school system and the community is no longer understood the same way by all parties. It is contributing to increased enrollment at a school that is already overenrolled. Further, it has generated efforts to override the Board-mandated student assignment patterns. Therefore, I have directed staff to cease use of this option immediately and to enforce the boundaries and assignment patterns mandated by the Board of Education and to follow the Board-adopted Student Transfer Policy as it should operate within those assignment patterns.

I have asked staff to review the student assignments in this area as part of the fall Capital Improvements Program. Unless there is a future modification by Board action, transfer requests for East Bethesda K–2 students from Rosemary Hills Elementary School to Bethesda Elementary School will be granted based on hardship or for rising kindergarten students who have an older sibling in Grade 1 or Grade 2, in accordance with the Board-adopted Student Transfer Policy. Students from East Bethesda continue to be assigned to Bethesda Elementary School for Grades 3–5. Because these students attend Bethesda Elementary School as the result of Board assignment, rather than as the result of an approved transfer, the sibling exemption, which is a part of the Student Transfer Policy, does not apply and transfers will not be approved on the basis of an older sibling in Grades 3–5.

For your information and edification, I have attached a chronology of the boundary history involving the East Bethesda community.

If you have any questions, please contact Mr. Larry A. Bowers, chief operating officer, at 301-279-3626, or me.

JDW:bsr

Attachment

Copy to:
Executive Staff