



Representing 1,200 Montgomery County Households

**Testimony Before the Board of Education on the
Montgomery County Public Schools
FY2010 Capital Budget & Amendments to the
FY2009-2014 Capital Improvements Program
November 12, 2008**

Good evening President Navarro, Vice President Brandman, and Superintendent Weast. I am Monica Hayes, East Bethesda Citizens Association (EBCA) Education Committee Chair. We thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the East Bethesda community in support of the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Capital Improvements Program (CIP) and we appreciate the many CIP projects that benefit our community. My testimony this evening will focus on the Superintendent's recommendations in Supplement A: Planning for Bethesda-Chevy Chase (B-CC) Elementary Schools. We look forward to working with the Board, MCPS and the B-CC Cluster to expeditiously develop a long-term solution for growing cluster elementary enrollment, and to deal with our community's inconsistent articulation pattern, during these difficult fiscal times.

East Bethesda

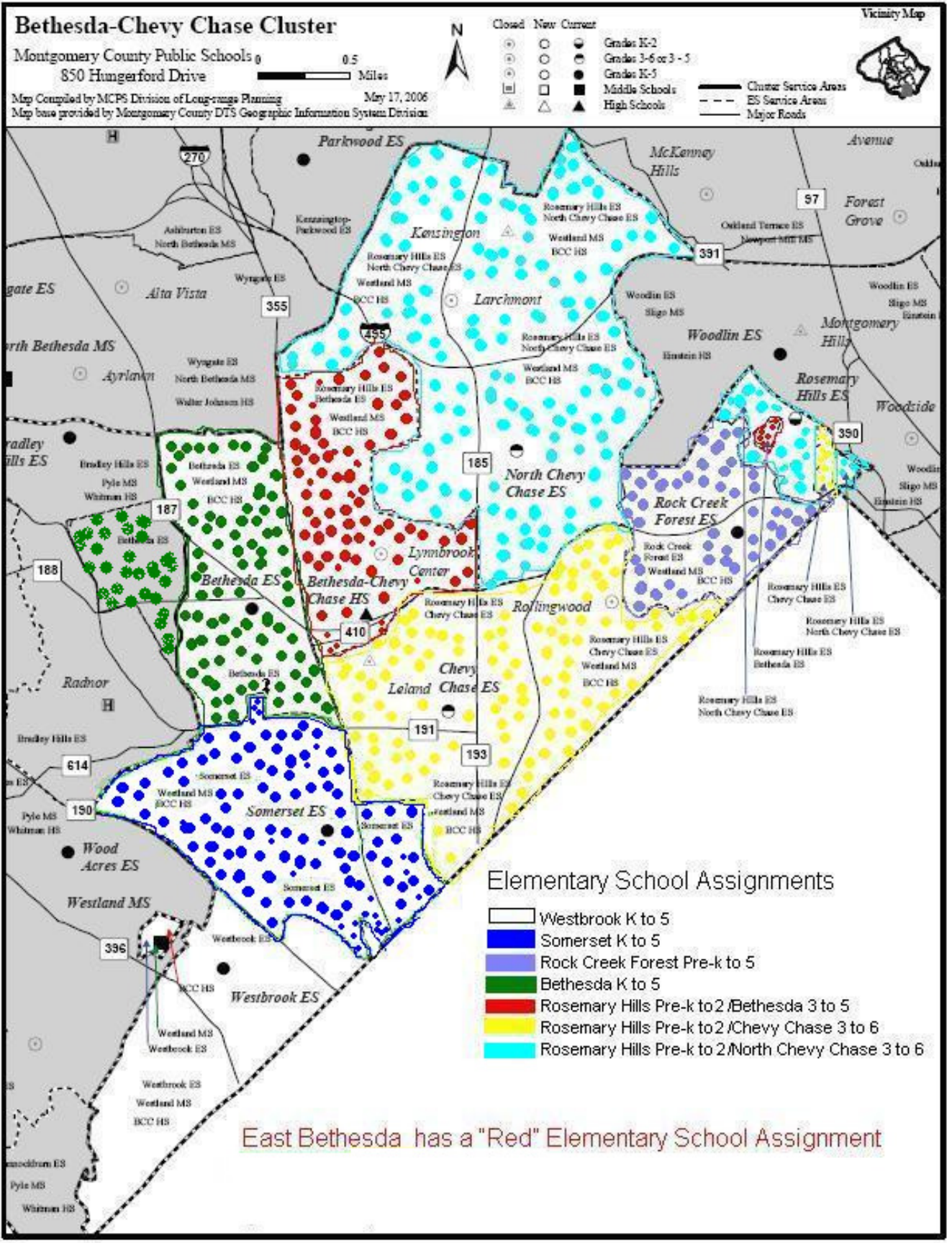
First, I'd like to provide a quick background on our community. The East Bethesda Citizens Association (EBCA) is one of the largest citizens associations in Montgomery County. It was started in the 1930's and represents over 1,200 households in Bethesda east of Wisconsin Avenue, north of East-West Highway, west of Columbia Country Club, and south of Jones Bridge Road.

East Bethesda residents are assigned to schools in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase (B-CC) Cluster for grades kindergarten through twelfth grade. East Bethesda's assigned elementary schools, based on a June 1986 Board decision, are:

- Rosemary Hills Primary School (a kindergarten through second grade school) for kindergarten through second grade,
- Bethesda Elementary (a kindergarten through fifth grade school) for grades three through five.

Due to this inconsistent articulation pattern, EBCA, in concert with the B-CC Cluster PTAs, had arranged with MCPS for residents to receive special consideration to request assignment to Bethesda ES in kindergarten, and to North Chevy Chase or Chevy Chase in second grade after attending Rosemary Hills. This agreement, established in 2000 and renewed after East Bethesda formally requested a change in elementary school boundaries in 2002, was rescinded by the Superintendent in July 2008. We have included a copy of the rescinded agreement as an attachment for your information.

East Bethesda's elementary school assignment, which it shares with the Paddington Square Community, a community located off Lanier Drive in Silver Spring, is depicted in red on the map below.

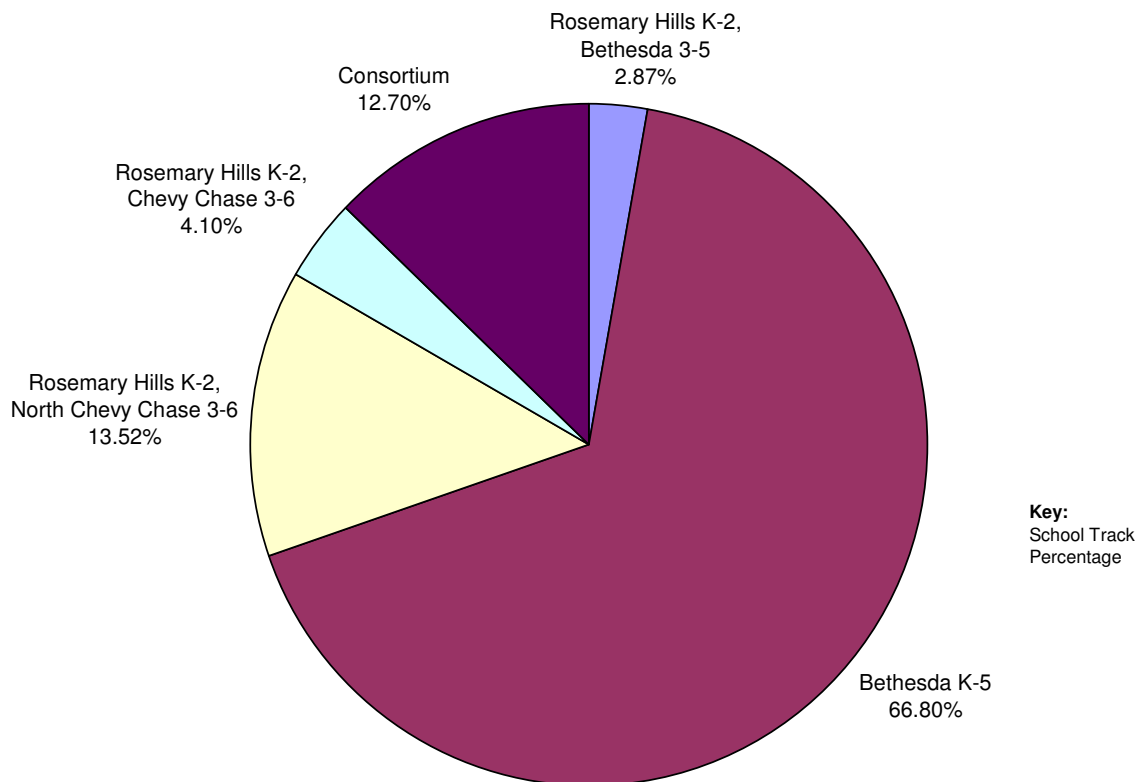


East Bethesda Community Elementary School Preferences

In September 2008, EBCA mailed surveys to 1280 households in our community to ensure we could represent the community's views on this issue. The survey was also available at three parks and was distributed at events (e.g. Halloween parade). Flyers were posted, and reminders were included in the EBCA newsletter and listserv, and it was available on the EBCA website between September and October 2008. As of October 31st we received 315 responses.

We are very fortunate that all four elementary schools our children attend are excellent and community residents showed support for each of these schools in the survey. However, as you can see below, less than 3% of our community prefers our assigned school track of Rosemary Hills K-2 then Bethesda ES 3-5. This shouldn't surprise MCPS as virtually all East Bethesda residents have traditionally taken advantage of the flexible transfer options that had been offered in the 2000 agreement to avoid our assigned track. The survey also showed that an overwhelming majority of respondents, about 67%, prefer Bethesda ES from kindergarten to 5th grade as the assigned school track for our community. We ask that you take these community preferences into account when making policy decisions and elementary school assignment concerning our community.

Community Preferences for East Bethesda's Assigned Elementary School Track



1280 East Bethesda households Surveyed. 315 responses received. Of those 21 were invalid or duplicates leaving 294 valid responses for a 23% (294/1280) valid survey response rate. 244 respondents expressed a preference for one of the five options listed above.

Supplement A: Planning for Bethesda-Chevy Chase Elementary Schools.

As the Supplement states there are unique planning issues in the B-CC paired elementary schools so I will start by providing a quick summary. The Supplement begins by reiterating the Superintendent's rescission of the flexible transfer option for our community in the 2000 agreement (attachment 1) and restates the restriction on sibling transfers to Bethesda ES imposed in the Superintendent's July 29 memorandum (attachment 2).

It then recommends that Rosemary Hills, Bethesda, North Chevy Chase and Chevy Chase all have "Capacity Studies" in FY 2010 to determine the feasibility of additions at each of the schools. These four schools are currently a combined 426 students over capacity and have thirteen relocatable classrooms

The Supplement refers to the Bradley Hills ES feasibility study currently being conducted, and indicates that the feasibility study will be expanded to consider the option of reassigning Bethesda ES students currently assigned to the Whitman cluster, to attend Bradley Hills ES to provide straight articulation for these students to Pyle Middle School and help address overutilization at Bethesda Elementary School.

It cites a commitment to school pairings for Rosemary Hills and North Chevy Chase and Chevy Chase ES, while acknowledging 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 and has unduly impacted some communities.

The Supplement states that in addition to geographic assignments, 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. It states that this option was initiated by the Board on March 1, 1983, when the Board of Education acted to establish school pairings.

The Supplement ends by stating that following the feasibility and capacity studies in FY 2010, MCPS will set a schedule for student assignments reviews and programming for additions at one or more of the schools.

East Bethesda Community Request to the Board of Education

We applaud MCPS's objectives to: provide adequate capacity to accommodate projected enrollment and to change the articulation pattern of portions of the Bethesda ES community that are assigned to attend Rosemary Hills for Grades K-2 and then to Bethesda for Grades 3-5, which the Supplement notes has been a longstanding source of concern and unduly impacted our community. However, we are greatly concerned that MCPS staff estimates that a solution to our longstanding issue of elementary school assignments will likely be at least five years away.

We respectfully ask the Board to accelerate the plan of action to review student assignments, address shortfalls in classroom space at these schools, and to

ease our community's transition while we wait for what we hope will be a change in our assigned elementary schools. **Specifically we ask:**

1) The BOE direct MCPS to accelerate the capacity studies for Rosemary Hills, Bethesda, North Chevy Chase, and Chevy Chase elementary schools so MCPS can begin a review of student assignments and programming for additions in FY2010. If that is not feasible, we request the Board ask MCPS to provide a report on options to accelerate the boundary review to occur as soon as possible to include phasing in of assignment changes and additions.

2) The BOE direct MCPS to provide clear written guidelines on how the option open to all students who attend Rosemary Hills Elementary School, to select Bethesda, Chevy Chase, or North Chevy Chase elementary schools at the completion of Grade 2 at Rosemary Hills, will be administered. This is particularly important since all four schools are currently overenrolled. As you are aware, our 2000 agreement was interpreted in different ways leading to misunderstandings. This should include clarification of MCPS provided transportation.

3) The BOE direct MCPS to reinstate the option to request transfers to Bethesda ES in kindergarten for students who are assigned to Bethesda Es for grades 3 to 5 while we await the boundary review. The BOE has allowed the flexible transfer option above for 2nd graders at Rosemary Hills in paired schools, it seems reasonable that you would allow kindergarten transfers for those assigned to Bethesda for grades 3 to 5 as a paired school.

4) The BOE and MCPS work with East Bethesda and the B-CC Cluster, to ease the transition to new assignments and to deal with our current awkward articulation pattern, with the goal of keeping families together and developing options to mitigate issues such as the differing bus schedules at Rosemary Hills and Bethesda ES.

Thank you for affording us this opportunity to speak on behalf of the East Bethesda Community. We appreciate your attention to the concerns we have raised this evening, we hope you will act on our requests, and we look forward to working with MCPS and the Board of Education to implement these projects to meet the educational needs of our children.

Attachments:

1) MCPS Memorandum to Ms. Alison Stansbury and Ms. Monica Hayes from Frank H. Stetson, Ed.D Community Superintendent dated January 31, 2002

2) MCPS Memorandum to Members of the Board of Education from Jerry D. Weast, Superintendent of Schools dated January 31, 2002