



Rosemary Hills Primary School PTA
2111 Porter Road
Silver Spring, MD 20910

November 4, 2010

To: Members of Montgomery County Board of Education

The PTAs of Rosemary Hills Primary School, North Chevy Chase Elementary School, Chevy Chase Elementary School have reached out to our communities to gauge their reaction to Dr. Weast's recommendation. While our school communities and our schools have somewhat different histories, our communities have common concerns and priorities. Our communities support the key elements of Dr. Weast's recommendations, the building of a new middle school within the eastern side of the cluster and, with support from just a small majority, the movement of the 6th graders to a middle school setting.

While the Rosemary Hills school community supports the key elements of Dr. Weast's recommendations, of special concern is current Rosemary Hills families whose children will likely not attend a new middle school, but will feel the impact of any disparity between what is offered at the middle school and what is offered to the 6th graders still in elementary school. We believe that the current overcrowding will likely continue to worsen and follow these students through their educational experience, unless the Board acts quickly on the recommendations offered by the superintendent.

Rosemary Hills houses more than 650 Pre-K through 2nd grade students. Like many Montgomery County schools, our enrollment has grown substantially in recent years. However, Rosemary Hills is unique in several ways:

- As a primary school, Rosemary Hills serves a very young student body – students who are 8 years old and under. They generally are in need of more assistance (with lunch, at dismissal, with shuttling from one room to another) than typical elementary schools which serve K-5 students, many of whom are older and can “do for themselves” to a greater degree and whose older students can serve as “buddies” to help younger students.
- Rosemary Hills students articulate to **three** elementary schools. We are the only primary school in the county with this articulate pattern. This articulation pattern places an extraordinary burden on our teachers and staff, who must schedule and attend meetings with staff and teachers at each of these three schools and who, most importantly, must

tailor their teaching methods to suit the teaching approaches at all three of these schools. Under the primary school model, it is essential that the transition from 2nd to 3rd grade go as smoothly as possible – and having the students articulate to three schools – and forcing each 2nd grade teacher to communicate with so many 3rd grade teachers across three schools – increases the likelihood that continuity will be jeopardized for the students.

- Rosemary Hills houses three Pre-K classes, two of which serve children with autism, as well as a Kindergarten class serving children with autism.
- Rosemary Hills has one of the highest rates of FARMS elementary students in our cluster – 15.1% as of 2009-2010.

In short, a student body of 650 students at Rosemary Hills is very different from a student body of 650 at any of the County's other primary schools – and is even more different from a student body of 650 at a K-5 elementary school. Increases in enrollment at Rosemary Hills have a more dramatic impact than enrollment increases in a K-5 elementary school. Due to the composition of our student body, coupled with staffing reductions year after year, our school depends upon a tremendous number of parent volunteers to help us every day – with lunch, with recess, in our media center, in our specials classrooms and with many other aspects of our daily operations and special programs.

The school's enrollment exceeds capacity by 182 students, and this year we are using 4 portable classrooms. Half of our second grade classes are outside the main building. Housing such young students in portable classrooms presents unique challenges related to security, and requires additional time in transit (and therefore detracts from instructional time) while students are shuttled to and from the main school building to access restrooms and core spaces. This is not a viable long-term solution for the approximately 100 students housed in these portable classrooms each year.

One solution to address this overcrowding is to build an addition, as Dr. Weast has recommended. However, building an addition is not the first choice of the RHPS community. Rather, our PTA's position is that Rosemary Hills' overall enrollment should be decreased. The simplest way to achieve a reduction in enrollment is to assign East Bethesda families to Bethesda Elementary. This approach would both reduce Rosemary Hills' overall enrollment and, equally as important, would reduce from three to two the number of schools with which our teachers and staff must coordinate – which would be a meaningful and positive change for all involved.

Bethesda Elementary would like to have these families in their school, the neighborhood is tired of the uncertainty of their situation, and reassigning these students would lessen the overcrowding at Rosemary Hills. Moving these students to Bethesda Elementary would also make enrollment more predictable for Rosemary Hills, as well as for Chevy Chase and North Chevy Chase Elementary Schools, since families would not have a choice of schools in which to enroll. It would also resolve a longstanding issue for the East Bethesda neighborhood.

For these reasons, our PTA respectfully requests that the Board of Education make a decision about the articulation pattern for East Bethesda as quickly as possible. We were told that one of

the purposes of the Roundtable was to address that uncertainty. We would like to make sure that portion gets addressed. Until the Board of Education makes a decision, we need clarification for the families of East Bethesda to know if they are still eligible for school choice, as they are now.

Should the Board determine that Rosemary Hills student enrollment will continue to exceed its current capacity, then, as a PTA, we support the Dr. Weast's recommendation to build an addition at Rosemary Hills to handle the increasing number of students at the school. We encourage the Board of Education to move as quickly as possible toward this goal.

Lastly, a ramification of decisions in the CIP have direct consequences for the operating budget. Specifically, our communities have significant outstanding concerns regarding the treatment of the 6th grade during the interim period between today and the time when the new middle school is accepting students. Without question, the issue of upmost concern to our communities, and around which there is the greatest degree of consensus, is the academic offerings for 6th graders -- an overwhelming percent of our community believes that NCCES and CCES 6th graders must be provided with 6th grade curricular offerings comparable to those in our home middle school, Westland Middle School, and those throughout the County. We want to make sure this concern is addressed in the operational budget discussions to come later this year.

Rosemary Hills students are just beginning their educational careers and we are proud of what our teachers and staff provide for our children. We urge the Board of Education to consider the needs of these young learners and make decisions for the long term that will provide the most benefit to their needs – fewer students in the school and facilities that are large enough to support the number of students who attend the school.

Respectfully,

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PTA Co-President

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