

**Rosemary Hills Primary School  
Community Survey Results  
May 2010**

**Survey Fielded by RHPS PTA**

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In April 2010, the Rosemary Hills PTA fielded a survey of parents to inform Community Roundtable discussions about a range of solutions to overcrowding in the elementary schools feeding from RHPS to Westland Middle School. This report details results of the survey.

## Survey Methodology and Response

- The survey was fielded April 17-28, 2010. Participation was elicited via posts on the RHPS PTA listserv and a postcard that went out to all RHPS families via RHPS student backpack mail.
- The survey was web-based, and parents were also offered the option of completing the survey on printed forms.
- The survey did not require respondents to enter identifying information. Thus it could be completed anonymously via the web. Only one family chose to complete a paper survey.
- **356 surveys were submitted by parents. 328 surveys included complete responses (92%).** The remaining 8 percent of surveys included at least one question that was skipped. The survey was limited to one per computer IP address.
- Given the open nature of the survey eligibility process, it is not possible to calculate an overall response rate. We do not make claims that the results of this survey are statistically significant or statistically representative of the opinions of all RHPS parents. We believe that there is tremendous value in having input from the 356 parents who submitted surveys. There are approximately 540 families at RHPS. The survey was also open to parents who have children at Chevy Chase and North Chevy Chase and to parents of pre-school age children (who live in the RHPS attendance area).
- Upon request we are willing to share the raw data file of survey results with MCPS planners. In many cases parents provided their contact information, and in a few cases they expose their identity via their open-ended comments. We would delete this type of information before transmitting the data.

## Survey Description

The survey was brief, and parents were asked questions about the following (a copy of the survey is attached as Appendix A):

- What school(s) their children currently attend
- Opinions about proposals to move 6<sup>th</sup> grade to Westland Middle School
- Whether their opinion about having 6<sup>th</sup> grade remain at NCC and CCES (or move to Westland) would change if elementary schools offer more limited 6<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum than is offered at Westland
- Whether parents are willing to work with PTA organizers to advocate to ensure that resources and curriculum at NCC and CCES are clearly identified for 6<sup>th</sup> grade
- Opinions about desire for a middle school located more proximate to the RHPS attendance area
- Opinions about attending middle school for 6<sup>th</sup> grade if the middle school were located more proximate to the RHPS attendance area
- For parents who self-identify as living in East Bethesda, separate questions were asked about their preferences on school articulation patterns for their children

The survey also offered opportunities for parents to submit open-ended comments. **Parents composed and submitted 645 open-ended comments.** These comments offer rich qualitative data describing respondents' positions, opinions and suggestions on what are extremely complicated issues relating to overcrowding, curriculum, educational parity, local

history and expectations, and the confusing variety of approaches to school articulation options. We have attempted to compile representative comments for easier review within this report, but given the scope and number of comments, this was a daunting task. We encourage MCPS planners to read through ALL comments to get a true feel for the passion (and in many cases frustration and anger) expressed by parents about these issues as well as to see that there are a variety of minority opinions expressed by survey respondents that may not be communicated in the body of this report. All comments are included in Appendices labeled by the survey question they relate to.

### Survey Results

Most (88%) of survey respondents have at least one child currently attending RHPS. Respondents also have children who attend North Chevy Chase, Chevy Chase and Bethesda Elementary Schools and Westland Middle School. Some respondents report that they have children who are currently pre-school age (but will attend RHPS in the future).

Respondents have children currently attending the following schools		
Schools	Valid Percent	Response Count
Rosemary Hills	88.2%	314
North Chevy Chase Elementary	18.0%	64
Chevy Chase Elementary	18.8%	67
Bethesda Elementary	0.3%	1
Westland Middle School	5.9%	21
None--Have Children who will attend one of these	6.7%	24
<b>Total Responses</b>		<b>356</b>
<b>Skipped Question</b>		<b>0</b>

### Survey respondents want their children to attend 6<sup>th</sup> grade in their local elementary school

The large majority of respondents (76.1%) indicate that they DISLIKE somewhat or DISLIKE very much the idea of their 6<sup>th</sup> grader (or future 6<sup>th</sup> grader) attending Westland Middle School instead of Chevy Chase or North Chevy Chase elementary. Only 16.9% indicate that they like very much or like somewhat the idea of their 6<sup>th</sup> grader attending Westland Middle School.

Opinion about 6 <sup>th</sup> graders attending Westland MS	Valid Percent	Response Count
Dislike Very Much	51.4%	183
Dislike Somewhat	24.7%	88
Like Somewhat	10.7%	38
Like Very Much	6.2%	22
<b>Total Responses</b>		<b>331</b>
<b>Skipped Question</b>		<b>25</b>

## Survey respondents want academic parity for 6<sup>th</sup> graders—regardless of where they attend school

Parents were asked if their response to the above question would change if 6<sup>th</sup> graders at NCC and CC elementary would NOT be taught using the same new curriculum being rolled out county-wide for middle school. The majority (52.2%) indicate that their response would not change. A substantial minority (38.2%) indicated that their response would change. More than 200 parents wrote comments detailing their reactions to this possibility. Comments reflect a range of reactions: parents' views on whether 6<sup>th</sup> graders should be in middle school at all; reactions to the proposal that 6<sup>th</sup> graders in elementary school would not have access to the same education resources as 6<sup>th</sup> graders in middle school and respondents' feeling that we are perhaps being "threatened" with this scenario; expressions of confusion about what MCPS is proposing to do vis a vis curriculum differences for 6<sup>th</sup> graders in elementary vs. middle school; reactions relating to the fact that children in our community attend so many different schools (given that RHPS is a K-2 school); the distance and travel time to Westland; the size, capacity and overcrowding at Westland, among other issues. A sample of comments is included below (all comments are included in Appendix B).

- My reasons for wanting my daughter to stay in elementary school for 6<sup>th</sup> grade are more social development than academic. Also, Westland is TOO far away from our neighborhood. Traffic is HORRIBLE! Travel times are too long. It's a crazy articulation pattern.
- I need to know more about the new curriculum, and how it would differ from what the 6<sup>th</sup> graders at NCC and CCE are taught. Sixth grade curriculum should be uniform county-wide, without regard to the building in which the child sits. Not only curriculum, but also environment (smaller, more personal) plays an important role in a child's educational experience. If the curriculum were comparable, even if not identical, and if children could integrate in 7<sup>th</sup> grade without unnecessary additional stress, that might suffice.
- It only changes it [my response of dislike very much] to dislike somewhat. In my opinion, while primary schools come with their own benefit, we have tolerated the inconvenience of having children in different schools (two PTAs, twice the volunteering, twice the fundraising, twice the events, etc., not to mention just the different location) for the perk of having our 6<sup>th</sup> graders at NCC. Westland is far away and already way too big for the fragile age of junior high. The only redeemable solution is the creation of a new middle school (at Lynbrook, for example) that would cover our geographic area. Putting kids from this area on a bus for that long each day is inconceivable. They are very limited with "free" time as it is (and in this "free" time are supposed to contend with ever increasing loads of homework and extracurricular activities and somehow fit in family time and true free time). I urge you to consider a true long-term solution, which moving our 6<sup>th</sup> graders to Westland is not.
- I would prefer my son to be at Westland if the curriculum at CCES is not the standard 6<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum.
- The same curriculum should be offered to ALL sixth graders, regardless of where they attend school. It appears the administration is trying to force NCC and CC to move sixth graders to Westland, by punishing the students. This is wrong—however, I would change the articulation pattern, rather than have my child do with less.
- Of course all 6<sup>th</sup> graders should be taught from the same curriculum regardless of where they are in school. Ridiculous to even consider doing differently!
- I like the idea of an extended elementary school experience, especially since they have already transferred once after RHPS. However, if the schools have a 6<sup>th</sup> grade there,

the curriculum offered should be equivalent until the students are moved to a middle school. Slowly paring down the 6<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum to sub-standard levels seems to border on irresponsible. At minimum it's inconsistent with MCPS standards. If MCPS isn't paying currently for the CC and NCC 6<sup>th</sup> graders to be taught at Westland then they should pay for them to continue to receive their equivalent 6<sup>th</sup> grade instruction at CC/NCC until that move happens.

- I think the benefits of staying at NCC or CC for 6<sup>th</sup> grade are almost negated if the students aren't getting the same education as those at Westland so I'd be in favor of a move if that is the only way to get parity. However, I'm hesitant to support a "resolution" that creates what will be the biggest middle school in the county.
- It is unacceptable that the community is being forced into doing something they don't really want to do—move the 6<sup>th</sup> grade—under the threat of a sub-par education for their children should they remain at CCES or NCCES. This not a choice; it is a threat. In lengthy meetings at CCES it was clear that the MCPS rep. could not clearly explain WHY the appropriate classes couldn't be provided to CC/NCC (that there had been little to no creative thought into how to make this work), just that MCPS couldn't do it because of economy of scale and the mandate to cut special programs. MCPS has long made these [RHPS/NCC & CC school] pairings in order to increase diversity, promising that students would get extra support in order to mitigate the negative effects/burdens of pairings . . .

Parents report feeling very strongly about issues relating to academic parity for children articulating from RHPS through to Westland Middle School. Asked if they are willing to assist with advocacy efforts to work with MCPS to clearly identify what education resources will be available to 6<sup>th</sup> graders who attend CC and NCC (given that any proposal to relieve school overcrowding will take years to implement), respondents indicated that they are willing to participate in a variety of ways.

Ways Parents will Participate in Advocacy Efforts	Valid Percent	Response Count
Will co-sign petitions	62.6%	223
Willing to attend local meetings on this subject	55.9%	199
Willing to make inquiries and demands independently if provided with contact information	37.6%	134
Willing to help organize this type of advocacy effort	10.4%	37
Not willing	9.8%	35
	<i>answered question</i>	<b>330</b>
	<i>skipped question</i>	<b>26</b>

## Survey respondents think we need to consider building a new middle school

A very large majority—79.8% - of respondents thinks that MCPS should consider building a new middle school located closer to the RHPS community. Many respondents (146) wrote open-ended comments relating to this issue (all are included in Appendix C). A sample of comments include:

- A new middle school close by is my first choice of the approaches.

- This is the most sensible solution. The sooner MCPS undertakes this approach, the better.
- I only like that if we remain in the B-CC cluster . . .
- Absolutely. This solves the overcrowding issue at NCC, CC and Westland Middle School. Perhaps negates the need for additions at NCC and CC . . .
- This is essential. Schools need a community to support them and there is no way I can be involved in a school as far away as Westland.
- I am not sure exactly where they would build. But I do recall that everyone complained when they tore down Kensington Middle School and Leland. Montgomery County should learn to plan better.
- Without this option, none of the others makes sense. It is short-sighted to address overcrowding at the elementary schools but not the middle school.
- Yes! I think many parents in the NCC and CC communities would be more in favor of moving the 6<sup>th</sup> grade to middle school if that middle school was much closer to our neighborhoods. The commute to Westland from NCC and CC is just too long and the kids spend way too much time on the bus each day . . . Plus, it is my understanding that Westland is already overcrowded and will be even more so with the addition of the 6<sup>th</sup> graders from NCC and CC—this area needs another middle school. I think a middle school in the range of 1400 kids is just way too big. We need another middle school in the BCC cluster, and we need it closer to NCC and CC.
- But not if this means my children will be sent to middle school in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I'm only in favor of this option because it seems like Westland is too far to be considered a community middle school.
- Westland is too far away for 6<sup>th</sup> graders living in the northern and eastern parts of the cluster. It is unreasonable to have 6<sup>th</sup> graders on the bus with 8<sup>th</sup> graders for 1.5 hours or more every day.
- I strongly support building a new middle school closer to our community. The Washington region has some of the highest traffic congestion in the nation. It makes no sense to send middle school children across the county during rush hour when there are other solutions available.
- Would be more cost-effective to use the Leland Community Center perhaps.
- North Chevy Chase Park sounds like an ideal location.
- The loss of the Larchmont School property is felt especially in this situation . . .
- Start now.
- I am uncertain on this issue. My primary concern is that I do not believe the 6<sup>th</sup> graders should be in the middle school, for developmental and educational reasons. While building a new middle school for overcrowding issues might be a good thing, it does not address the 6<sup>th</sup> grade issue. My concerns about the 6<sup>th</sup> graders going to middle school have nothing to do with the size and overcrowding issues in the middle school.
- Because of the focus on the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I don't believe that the community has been given an adequate chance to be presented with information about this option and to ask questions. I am concerned that Westland is in danger of becoming overly large, if not in 5 years, then 10 due to BRAC, Purple line, and other development. I am interested in exploring options about middle school, but not yet ready to endorse a new middle school (despite my yes to this answer). I have serious concerns about the negative impact of a new middle school if it creates more split articulation or if it is a shared middle school outside the BCC cluster.

- Westland is a perfectly good middle school. When we all moved here we knew this was our middle school. The county cannot afford this cost right now. Why should our tax dollars go for this?

## Survey respondents are more positive about the idea of their 6<sup>th</sup> graders attending middle school— *if it is located in our community*

The survey asked respondents how they would feel about their current or future 6<sup>th</sup> graders attending middle school if a new middle school was built closer to our community. As part of the question we provided the Lynbrook Park site as an example site. *(In hindsight, it would have probably been better not to give an example—it muddied responses to the question and raised concerns relating to use of the particular site.)* Nevertheless, 68% of respondents indicate they would LIKE somewhat or LIKE very much the idea of their 6<sup>th</sup> grader attending middle school *if the middle school were located closer to our community*. The percentage of respondents who reported DISLIKING this very much or DISLIKING this somewhat is 22.5%. This compares with 76.1% of respondents who DISLIKE very much or DISLIKE somewhat the idea of their 6<sup>th</sup> grader attending Westland Middle School.

Opinion about 6 <sup>th</sup> graders attending middle school if it were located closer to our community	Valid Percent	Response Count
Dislike Very Much	10.1%	36
Dislike Somewhat	12.4%	44
Like Somewhat	32.9%	117
Like Very Much	35.1%	125
<b>answered question</b>		<b>322</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>34</b>

Many respondents (117) wrote comments in response to this question. All comments are included in Appendix D. A sample of these comments includes:

- I would be ok with that. With middle school closer, our family could be more involved and active at the school, and some of my concerns about the developmental aspects of 6<sup>th</sup> graders in middle school could probably be alleviated. Westland is TOO far away to send my 11-year-old!!!!
- One of the reasons we're happy that my older daughter will be at NCC for 6<sup>th</sup> grade next year is she won't have to spend an hour and a half a day on the bus to get to and from school. I'm not happy about her missing out on course offerings, but avoiding that "commute" is worth it.
- Seems like a new middle school somewhere east of downtown Bethesda is necessary. Busing kids from Chevy Chase and North Chevy Chase and Kensington to Westland is crazy!
- I only like that if we remain in the B-CC cluster. I don't want my kids going to someplace other than B-CC.
- Hard to answer this question—there are too many variables. I would generally be in favor of this on its face.
- . . . I dislike this less than sending them to Westland because Westland would be farther than a community school, but it doesn't change the fact that I will be very sad if my children enter middle school in 6<sup>th</sup> grade for all of the reasons I stated earlier.

- . . . I want to keep my kids in my neighborhood as long as possible.
- I dislike this idea less than moving all 6<sup>th</sup> graders to Westland, but I would strongly prefer keeping the children in 6<sup>th</sup> grade in elementary school.
- I am in favor only if this action decreases classroom size while maintaining educational excellence no matter what school.
- I think 6<sup>th</sup> graders are better served socially, emotionally and academically by being the oldest at their school, so I prefer keeping them with the lower grades. But this [a closer middle school] would be the second best option.
- I've heard some say that it is a foregone conclusion that the Chases will lose their 6<sup>th</sup> grades. If that is truly the case (and I hope that it is not), it would be a better alternative to Westland—smaller shorter bus ride, closer for parents—thereby putting less stress and financial burden on families with students at 3 different schools.
- I still feel that 6<sup>th</sup> graders belong in elementary school, but having a new school in the neighborhood that also had all the curricular support from MCPS probably tips me over a little from neutral to “like somewhat”.
- I prefer they stay at their neighborhood elementary, but I would be more open to this transition if the middle school were closer.

### **East Bethesda respondents like articulation patterns that keep 6<sup>th</sup> grade in elementary school AND the idea of their children attending Bethesda K-5**

Residents of East Bethesda (EB) have a notoriously complicated and fragmented school articulation pattern, and our survey attempted to learn from EB respondents about opinions and preferences that may be specific to their concerns. It is important to note that the 74 respondents who responded to questions about East Bethesda all *self-identified* as living in East Bethesda. Only respondents who self-identified in this manner were asked questions on the survey about articulation options specific to East Bethesda.

EB respondents were asked to indicate how much they like different K-5 or K-6 articulation patterns. Similar to survey respondents overall, EB respondents like articulation patterns that keep 6<sup>th</sup> graders in elementary school more than articulation patterns that end elementary school at the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. The option that the highest percentage of responding EB residents LIKES somewhat or very much (59.4% of respondents) is RHPS (K-2) to North Chevy Chase Elementary (3-6). Having said this, EB respondents' second highest rated articulation pattern is Bethesda Elementary (K-5). Almost 57% of EB respondents LIKE this option somewhat or very much.

A couple of EB respondents indicated (in their open-ended comments) that where people live within East Bethesda affects how they access routes out of their neighborhoods to travel east to RHPS, NCC and/or CC elementary schools. Depending on this (and due to extremely heavy traffic in the area), they may prefer one school or articulation pattern over another. The following is a summary of EB responses to proposed school articulation options. A number of open-ended comments pertaining to these and other issues is included in Appendix E.

School Articulation Pattern	Like Very Much + Like Somewhat		Dislike Very Much + Dislike Somewhat	
	Valid Percent	Response Count	Valid Percent	Response Count
RHPS (K-2) to North Chevy Chase (3-6)	59.4%	44	24.3%	18
Bethesda Elementary (K-5)	56.7%	42	20.3%	15
RHPS (K-2) to Chevy Chase (3-6)	45.9%	34	35.1%	26
New K-5 elementary located in Bethesda	43.3%	32	29.7%	22
RHPS (K-2) to North Chevy Chase (3-5)	27.1%	20	50.0%	37
RHPS (K-2) to Chevy Chase (3-5)	12.2%	9	60.8%	45
<b><i>74 respondents self-identified as EB residents and were asked these questions</i></b>				

## Conclusion

We concluded the RHPS Community Survey by offering respondents a final opportunity to provide open-ended comments. Despite having commented extensively in response to previous questions, 136 respondents wrote comments that cover a range of issues relating to overcrowding, desire to maintain (and build new) community schools, demands for parity in academic and enrichment programming for our 6<sup>th</sup> graders, consideration for quality of life for students and families in planning reasonable travel times in our high-traffic area, the opportunity many want for our children to extend “childhood” through 6<sup>th</sup> grade by remaining in elementary school with quality programming, fears about both RHPS and Westland’s large student body sizes, and the need for both thoughtful and expeditious action to plan for and build the education infrastructure our community’s children both need and deserve (among other issues!). We encourage MCPS planners and administrators to review and consider all comments that parent respondents took the time to prepare and submit.