September 11, 2019

Dear Board of Education

On behalf of the Special Education Citizens Advisory Council (SECAC), we are writing this letter to express our concern over the redistricting process. We are a committee established by the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) who seeks to gather input from parents, community partners, and educators to share information on local issues involving students with disabilities. We advocate for students who have disabilities with the leadership of the HCPSS, the Board of Education, the County Executive, the County Council, and other community agencies and organizations.

We would like to bring to your attention of several potential, unintended consequences for students with disabilities in the redistricting process.

Our first concern includes the risk of placing students in more segregated classrooms and programs in the receiving schools. If students with disabilities are moved to other schools, are the same services and supports available at that placement, and do parents understand that their children must have those same services delivered to them in a free and appropriate public education? We are concerned there might be a lack of professional development in the receiving schools around providing for the needs of students with disabilities. There is a risk to provide related services in larger group settings and a risk of less 1-1 services. There is also a risk of more regional placement of services instead of home school placement when lines are redrawn.

We have a concern over transportation of students with disabilities in that this redistricting process might lengthen the time a student with disabilities is on the bus, further causing them harm. According to the Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services[[1]](#footnote-1) published bulletin on Transportation, while there is no maximum amount of ride time that is required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, a lengthy bus ride may be discriminatory when a denial of a free appropriate public education has occurred. Excessive travel time can have a negative impact on a student with a disability.

Community support is critical for our families who have a child/children with a disability. Policy 6010 directs the board to consider community stability. "Where reasonable, school attendance areas should promote a see of community in both the geographic place (e.g., neighborhood or place in which a student lives) and the promotion of a student from each school level....keeping contiguous communities or neighborhoods together, and minimizing the frequency with which any one student is reassigned."[[2]](#footnote-2) This can be especially difficult for our children. Some students with disabilities struggle with making friends and coping with transitions. This plan may unintentionally isolate students with disabilities from their peers and further marginalize them. Additionally, we as parents depend upon the community support systems that we have built in our neighborhood. Splitting communities may cause unintentional hardships for families. Many school districts that have redistricted have implemented separate policy determining placement for students with disabilities. Please consider this when finalizing the plan to allow for greater flexibility in placement for students with disabilities.

We ask that you consider these concerns and reach out to us if you have further questions.

Thank you for your time,

Stephanie Carr and Mai Hall, Co-Chairs Howard County SECAC

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1. Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services. 2016. Technical Assistance Bulletin 16-01. *Frequently asked questions about transportation of children with disabilities.* Maryland State Department of Education. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Policy 6010 School Attendance Areas. Retrived 30 August 2019 from <https://www.hcpss.org/policies/6000/6010-school-attendance-areas/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)