



Indian Origin Network of Howard County

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Indian Origin Network of Howard County (IONHoCo) is committed to increasing diversity, inclusion and equity in the Howard County Public School System and in all levels of the government.

IONHoCo supports the intent of County Resolution 112-2019 aimed at resolving the educational achievement gap in schools, and the intent of the Superintendent's proposed redistricting plan to improve equity in schools and normalize the school capacity utilization across all schools, but does not support redistricting as the sole mechanism for achieving equity in schools. IONHoCo believes that there are better evidence-based solutions for eliminating the educational achievement gap in schools. IONHoCo supports redistricting for the purpose of addressing overcrowding in schools.

IONHoCo opposes the Superintendent's redistricting plan for the following reasons:

1. The proposed redistricting plan has some highly unusual boundary lines. For example, the catchment area for Atholton High School barely looks contiguous.
2. The proposed redistricting plan buses out students from an under capacity school while, at the same time, moving students into the same school. For example, the proposed redistricting plan buses students from River Hill High School to Wilde Lake High School and moves another set of students from Wilde Lake High School to River Hill High School.
3. The proposed plan assumes that busing supposedly wealthier kids to schools with a higher proportion of kids on Free and Reduced Meals ("FARM") will fix the academic inequality and bring about socioeconomic diversity, without the need for additional resources for the schools in areas with a high proportion of FARM kids.
4. The proposed redistricting plan drastically reduces the number of walkers and increases the average commute time for the students, making the coordination of after school activities more complicated for students and parents, especially for the working single parents.

5. The proposed redistricting plan does not completely address the school overcrowding problem, as some schools will become overcrowded again in the near future.
6. The busing of over 7300 students outside of their neighborhoods creates
 - a. Increased transportation costs for a school system that is already severely over budget,
 - b. Additional traffic congestion for a County that is already suffering with traffic problems, and
 - c. Negative mental health and physical health consequences for children who have to wake up earlier and will be uprooted from their communities of support. The commute times of a significant number of students impact is expected to increase from 5 to 10 minutes / each way to over 40 minutes given the number of bus stops and traffic.
7. The proposed redistricting plan leads to gerrymandering of the school districts.

Recommendations:

IONHoCo recommends the Board of Education adopt a plan that includes the following components to achieve true educational equity for the children in Howard County:

- 1) Allocate additional resources to the schools in areas with high rates of FARM students, as needed, to bring all of the HCPSS Schools to similar levels with regard to test scores and other academic performance indicators. For example:
 - a. Have the class sizes be dependent on the school performance, by reducing the class size for schools with lower test scores.
 - b. Encourage increased parent participation in the schools, and support stronger PTAs.
 - c. Rotate teachers between schools at regular intervals to maintain the consistency and standards of education at all schools.
- 2) Exempt rising high school Juniors and seniors from redistricting.
- 3) Address educational equity concerns by engaging in a thoughtful process with research, data and evidence-based solutions before impacting more than 7300 students.
- 4) Adhere to the community recommendations from the community input sessions held by the Superintendent in July 2019:
 - a. Keep feeds of students together from one school to the next,
 - b. Maintain contiguous communities or neighborhoods, and
 - c. Consider transportation issues from the perspective of the students and their parents
- 5) Request the County Council to review proposed development to ensure that they do NOT add to the inequality.
- 6) Strengthen Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) to ensure smart development.

Conclusion:

1) While we fully support the intentions of the County Council & the Superintendent to advance equity in schools, we are concerned with the implementation aspects of the Superintendent's proposed redistricting plan announced on August 22, 2019. The plan falls short of addressing the real challenges and in addition raises new concerns for the students and for the County.

2) Redistricting the schools without adding additional resources to normalize the school standards will lead to further gentrification. No matter how you redistrict the schools, there will always be one school that performs better than the others with respect to test scores and people with the financial resources will move to that school district, increasing its performance level, and subsequently raising the demand & prices for homes in that school district.

3) We need to adhere to Jim Rouse's vision and ensure appropriate distribution of housing in all neighborhoods. This should be the responsibility of the County Council and the School System.

IONHoCo urges the Board of Education to take a holistic and long term view on the redistricting and NOT use the redistricting as the only tool to fix the inequalities in the County. Let it always be the children before politics.

For Questions / Comments: info@ionhoco.org