

Remarks by Xiao Boynton to the School Board

At December 8, 2016 School Board Public Hearing on Redistricting

Good evening, members of the School Board. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you. I am a resident of Planning Block 72 with one rising kindergartener and a three-year son. My family moved to Alexandria this summer with the excitement about our wonderful neighborhood school George Mason Elementary and its adjacent communities.

Over the past few months, I have closely monitored the very confusing redistricting process, and communicated with all of you either in person or via email about the deep concern my family and I have that the current redistricting maps violate many of the criteria approved by the Board. When the overarching goal of redistricting is stated as to “enable students to attend their neighborhood schools with equitable access to instructional programs and services, [and], a cost effective manner,” how are you as a Board justified to be considering current maps #7, 8 and 9, all of which propose to move 82 walkers in my block out of our neighborhood school? Putting aside the unnecessary disruptions to our children’s education and nearby communities, converting walkers to busers is simply not a cost effective manner.

Let me quickly list the majority of the redistricting criteria the current maps violate – student safety, transpiration, program continuity, sensible and fair boundary lines, and diversity. While all three current maps move local walkers in my block out of GMES, they propose to continue and even add students bused into GMES, more than twice the number of children in PB72. The newly converted busers from my block out of GMES and the disproportionately large group of kids bused into GMES will essentially crisscross each other’s neighborhood school every day. Also ironically, as the only contiguous planning block of GMES being moved out under map #8 and #9, PB72 is comprised of the most diversified housing of condos, townhomes, and single family homes. Our PB72 walkers bring to GMES rich ethnic and socioeconomic diversity in its own neighborhood, a stated criteria that redistricting has failed to meet.

The criteria that you seem to be heavily focusing on when moving us out is capacity. I would like to call your attention to the actual number of students in PB72. When the current maps were drawn, the student count of PB72 was 73 kids, which I understand was changed to 82 a few days ago. Removing this small group of children would not serve to free up a single classroom at any given grade at GMES, and would therefore fail to achieve many meaningful gain in the capacity criteria.

With the addition of relocatables and GMES being slotted for an earlier rebuild to be completed by 2023, the 5th year following redistricting, I urge the School Board to take these new factors into account to maintain the integrity of GMES neighborhoods and keep disruptions to our children and families to a minimum. The unfair handling of our small block 72, as well as the many violations that I outlined, need to be addressed urgently in accordance to the Board’s own criteria. PB72 walkers must stay in our neighborhood school GMES.

[I would like to present to you a petition letter from PB72 signed by 160 City residents – with and without ACPS students – to urge the School Board to keep PB72 in GMES. Thank you.]