

Christy King-Gilmore Comments
Redistricting Public Hearing
December 8, 2016

Dr. Crawley, Chairwoman Graf and Members of the Board, thank you for this opportunity to speak. I submitted a longer version of these comments, but given the presentation time constraints will be presenting excerpts from those comments tonight.

My name is Christy King-Gilmore. I am the parent of a child at George Mason Elementary. Our family lives in Planning Block 72. In the current redistricting maps – 7, 8 and 9 - our Planning Block is moved from George Mason and sent either to Charles Barrett or Douglas MacArthur. I take issue, for two reasons, with the proposals.

First, moving our family away from George Mason would be very disruptive. I get the impression that some members of this process view this as a fairly minimal move, looking at it as moving a handful of kids from one “good” school to another “good” school a mile away. I reckon if my family were not directly impacted by this redistricting, requiring me to think through all of the probable ramifications, I too wouldn’t think much of it. However, I have had to think through the ramifications, and I would like to take a few moments to share why this move would not be inconsequential.

A move to a new school would impact many facets of our lives.

- 1) How we get to school will be impacted. We live half a mile from school, and we walk to school. We start our day off with a bit of exercise as we walk, we see and greet friends along the way and we converse and interact with our son along the way. If we are moved to Barrett or MacArthur, we will drive or ride the bus because walking a mile and a half is not practicable given little legs and the need to timely start the work commute.
- 2) The school day will be disrupted. By the time redistricting is scheduled to take effect, my son will have been at George Mason for several years. He would then be uprooted to a new school. I don’t question the quality of the proposed schools, but I do want to emphasize how disruptive this will be. He will come into a new school and need to learn a new process, bond with new teachers and administrators and make a whole new set of friends. Additionally, he will be coming into a grade and a classroom where most of the children will be returning students. Based on the demographics of Planning Block 72, there are not a lot of other kids his age in our Planning Block, so there will not be many of his current classmates or peers being moved.
- 3) Aftercare will be impacted. We utilize the school’s aftercare and have formed relationships with the staff members and friendships with the children. If we are moved to Barrett or MacArthur, those relationships will be lost. New programs will have to be learned, relationships with new staff and children formed, and the recreational care option is not necessarily comparable to the school aftercare option.
- 4) Extracurricular activities will be impacted. My son participates in sports. Often these recreational sports teams are built around a child’s school. For example, the soccer team is made up of George Mason students, and the kids and coaches, by and large, continue form year to year. Separately, we go to George Mason’s playground since it is our neighborhood playground. Invariably, we see buddies there. If moved to Barrett or MacArthur, the people on the teams and at the playground will no longer be school peers.

To try to put this in perspective – if someone came to me and told me they were going to change the way I get to work, move me to a different building, surround me with new colleagues, and change where I can go and who I can hang out with after work, it would be a big deal for me. It's no less for our kids.

This leads me to the second reason I take issue with these proposals. They will impact our family, and therefore if they are going to go into effect there better be a darn good reason and underlying, supporting analyses and decision-making consistent with the redistricting criteria. As you know, the school board adopted an overarching goal and ten redistricting criteria, all equally weighted, that were to set the parameters for redistricting decisions. Maps 7, 8 and 9 (like many of the predecessor maps) propose redistricting that is in contravention of many of the criteria.

- 1) The proposals are inconsistent with the overarching goal of “[e]nabling students to attend their neighborhood school.” My family is a half mile, ten minute walk from George Mason, and maps 7, 8 and 9 propose to move our family to a school a mile and a half away.
- 2) The proposals are inconsistent with criteria two promoting safe walk zones/routes to school. Currently we walk half a mile down a relatively quiet street on a continuous sidewalk with lots of other kids walking. The proposals to move us to Barrett would entail an extra mile of walking. The proposal to move us to MacArthur would require an extra mile of walking and the crossing of two very busy streets – Braddock and King.
- 3) The proposals violate criteria three which is the minimization of bus transportation and travel time. We currently walk a half mile to school. It takes us roughly 10 minutes. Both of the proposals would move us to schools that are over a mile further away. It would not be practicable for us to walk, so we would drive or require bussing. Both would increase traffic congestion, and bussing would certainly increase travel time. The number of busses that would be needed, the location of the bus routes and stops, the cost of the newly needed busses and drivers have not been analyzed, so the ultimate time and fiscal impact of this move cannot be assessed as of yet, but suffice it to say, the travel time for PB 72 students would increase and new busses, drivers and funding would be required.
- 4) The proposal to move PB 72 to MacArthur is inconsistent with criteria number seven which is to minimize the need for more than one boundary change in the elementary life of the child. If the redistricting effort and rebuild of MacArthur go as planned, it is possible that my child would spend a few years at George Mason then be moved to MacArthur and then be moved to a swing school while MacArthur is rebuilt, requiring my son to attend three different schools in his elementary school career.
- 5) The proposals are inconsistent with criteria eight for some of the kids in PB 72 (our neighbor for example who will be entering the fourth grade when the redistricting is scheduled to take effect). Criteria number eight calls for minimizing change for children who have spent the majority of their elementary school experience in a school. PB 72 consists of kids of varying ages.
- 6) The proposals are inconsistent with criteria number nine which is to consider the proximity of the school and look for natural boundary lines. We live a half mile, a roughly ten minute walk from George Mason. Some of the families in PB 72 live even closer to George Mason.
- 7) The proposal is inconsistent with criteria number ten to consider rich diversity of school division. PB 72, unlike many of the George Mason Planning blocks, consists of single family homes, condos and townhouses, as such our planning block brings some of the socio-economic diversity to George Mason.

The proposals seem solely motivated by the capacity criteria. However, neither the contractor or the steering committee have done an analysis to determine whether the removal of PB 72 students from George Mason would have any meaningful effect on classroom size or instructional capacity (given the demographics/grade mix of PB 72 kids). This leaves me to question whether these proposals even meet the capacity criteria.

In conclusion, the proposals on maps 7, 8 and 9 related to PB 72 are in direct contravention of five to six of the ten redistricting criteria as well as the overarching goal. Given the disruption to families and the inconsistency with the redistricting criteria, I urge you to reconsider the current proposals and allow PB 72 to remain at George Mason and request the use of relocatables to provide temporary classroom (band, orchestra, TAG) capacity and to move George Mason up in the line for rebuild to provide a long-term capacity solution. Thank you.