
4. Community Engagement

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Figure 4.1 - Location of Six Community Meetings

Community Engagement Overview

The second section of this report covers the intent, approach, and outcomes of community engagement as a part of the Districtwide Boundary Analysis. This analysis is structured around two interconnected processes of data analysis and community engagement. These processes inform one another throughout the three phases of the analysis discussed in greater depth in the Introduction on page 38.

Because data analysis and community engagement are closely interrelated in this boundary analysis, we recommend referring to the data analysis in Section I as a companion to this section, both to inform your understanding of community feedback, and to explore the ways in which community input informed our approach to data analysis.

As of the publishing of this interim report, Section II: Community Engagement documents our overarching approach to community engagement, and contains insights from Phase 1 of community engagement, which began in fall 2019, and consists of four core strategies: regional community meetings, small group meetings, interviews, and online participation. These strategies are discussed in greater detail in the pages that follow, along with an exploration of outcomes and insights from the process thus far.

This section will be updated in the final report to reflect additional engagement insights from Phase 2, taking place in spring 2020.

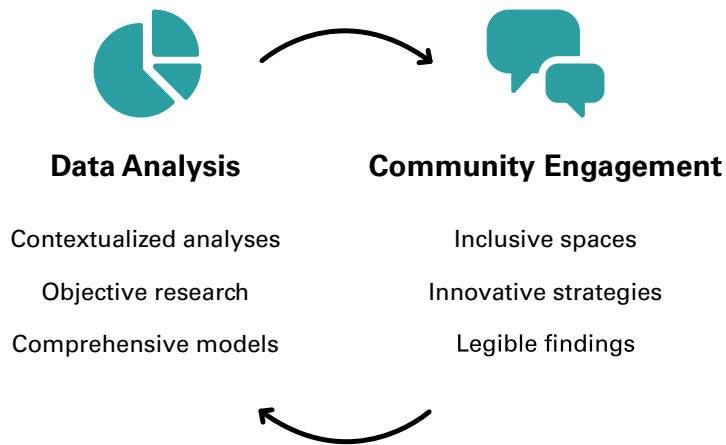
Engagement Activities at a Glance

- Regional community meetings (to invite broad public participation, by county region)
- Small group meetings (to engage underrepresented groups)
- Interviews (to learn from community members and stakeholders)
- Online Participation (to gather similar input as in public meetings via online surveys)
- Virtual Meetings (to reach a broader range of participants not reached in other formats)

Intent of Community Engagement

A thoughtful approach to public engagement is an essential element of effective civic processes. Complex systemic challenges – such as those experienced in MCPS today – cannot be solved simply through an understanding of data points. Community narratives offer invaluable context that data analysis does not express on its own. This context can bring more clarity to today’s conditions, as well as direct decision-makers to more relevant, timely, and responsive solutions.

In the Boundary Analysis process, data intelligence and community intelligence operate in tandem: community engagement provides integral context, insight, and complexity to the data, while data analysis adds depth and clarity to community narratives



Community engagement in this Boundary Analysis is intended to serve as a two-way process that both enables participants to gain knowledge and awareness about central issues, key data points, and the Boundary Analysis process, and enables MCPS to gather critical insights about the specific needs and challenges that the community foresees, as well as their insights about the factors that guide their decision-making regarding school boundaries: utilization, diversity, proximity, and assignment stability.

Through this engagement process, we aim to:

- **Create a common understanding** of county-wide issues that impact the public school system
- **Acknowledge a range of opinions** that might be conflicting at times, but help establish a strong foundation for future decision-making processes
- **Increase county residents’ awareness** so that they can meaningfully participate in future discussions related to school boundaries
- **Gather baseline information** from the public that can inform our team’s analysis and be incorporated into reports for the Board of Education and the general public

To pursue the objectives above, the community engagement process is guided by key principles:

- **Engagement should progress throughout the process.**
Our engagement process progresses alongside the process of data analysis. A common pitfall in public engagement is to ask local communities to come up with solutions to a problem, before establishing a shared understanding of the problem’s meaning and complexity. In the earlier stages of this process, we discuss local concerns without anticipated solutions, and respond to the concerns, questions, and feedback we receive from community members as the process progresses.
- **Engagement should be broad.**
As a county of over a million residents, we recognize that there is no one “community” in Montgomery County. In this process, we aim to reach the greatest number of participants possible within the constraints of our project scope and timeline. This includes reaching participants through multiple mediums, spreading in-person engagement across different regions of the county, and conducting targeted outreach with groups that may experience barriers to participation in larger public meetings.
- **Engagement should be varied.**
To reach the widest range of participants and ensure a rich range of feedback, this process is designed to provide a variety of formats for learning and participating. For example, in Phase 1, this includes making engagement materials available at in-person meetings and through online, virtual presentations, as well as collecting feedback through table conversations and written responses. In Phase 2, we will introduce other formats for engaging with the data and offering insights, including through interaction with a digital tool currently in development. Throughout the process, we also include engagement at multiple levels: from one-on-one interviews, to small group meetings, to regional meetings with hundreds of participants.
- **Engagement should be two-way.**
As mentioned above, effective community engagement operates in two directions. We aim to both make information as clear and accessible as possible, and create opportunities to gather clear, insightful comments and feedback.

Engagement Approach

Our engagement approach is designed to maximize the depth and breadth of participation, as well as to capture the greatest possible amount of input given the constraints of the project scope and timeline, and considerable number of residents and stakeholders in Montgomery County .

This community engagement strategy is structured over the course of two phases, each with particular outreach objectives and activities. A phased approach provides more time to both gather and analyze community feedback, such that one phase can meaningfully inform the next. In this way, a phased approach creates room for this process to be both iterative (evolving throughout the process as we learn and engage) and responsive (adapting to the particular needs, challenges, and conditions of Montgomery County and MCPS).

Fall and Winter 2019

Phase 1

Data Analysis,
Community Awareness,
Ideas Gatherings

**Data Analysis &
Benchmarking Community
Engagement**

Winter and Spring 2020

Phase 2

Testing Ideas
and Metrics

**Data Analysis
Community Engagement**

May - June 2020

Phase 3

Final Report and
Presentation

Phase 1

Phase 1: Community Awareness and Information Gathering aims to increase county residents' awareness around key challenges and opportunities within the current boundaries and provide a platform for discussion. The following activities are either complete or in progress as a part of Phase 1 community engagement:

- Area-Wide Meetings (6 complete)
- Targeted Meetings - with "Hard to Reach Groups" (12 complete)
- One-on-one interviews or small group meetings of 2-3
- Online presentation and survey
- Virtual meetings (including countywide student engagement)

Phase 2

Phase 2 will involve presenting data and engagement findings from Phase 1 and understand the trade-offs between the four analytical lenses used in the boundary analysis (utilization, diversity, proximity, and assignment stability). This section will be updated at the conclusion of Phase 2 with greater discussion of the strategies and activities during this phase, and the insights documented through these activities.

Phase 1:

Community Awareness and Information Gathering

For community members to meaningfully engage with the Districtwide Boundary Analysis, it is necessary to establish a shared understanding of the challenges currently faced by MCPS, and the stakes underlying this kind of analysis. Complex data sets, such as those being used in this analysis, can be overwhelming and inaccessible for many participants (while exciting or familiar to others). Through Phase 1 engagement activities, our team aimed to share baseline information with the community and, through involved discussions, facilitate learning and discussion around the following lines of inquiry:

- How has MCPS evolved over the decades, and what were some of the key moments in time that informed MCPS’s strategies around school facilities and student assignment?
- What are the major “lenses”, articulated under Policy FAA, that inform much of MCPS’s ongoing and future strategic actions (utilization, diversity, proximity, and assignment stability)?
- What do these lenses mean within the context of MCPS, and in relation to this data analysis?
- What is the impact of these lenses, across and within school clusters, as well as across levels of schooling (elementary, middle, high)?

Within each engagement activity in Phase 1, facilitators worked to establish a baseline understanding of the above questions through the sharing of maps, timelines, and key statistics, and to enlist the lived expertise of residents to add to or extrapolate from the story told by the data. Residents were asked to share their reactions and insights to the data associated with the key lenses (utilization, diversity and proximity) and what would be required to deepen and refine this boundary analysis in preparation for the second phase of engagement and data analysis.

To maximize public inputs during Phase 1, our team followed an engagement strategy that invited participation at a variety of scales, and through a variety of formats. The objectives of each component are described below:

Regional Meetings

To enable broad outreach in Phase 1, regional meetings were held in regions throughout the county at central school locations. The meetings were designed to maximize participant input through facilitated discussions, facilitator and participant worksheets, live polling, and collecting written and verbal questions. These meetings were strategically located in six diverse geographic locations to attract participation from residents across the county. (See further discussion and insights on **page 366**)

Small group meetings

These meetings, which began in February 2020 and will continue throughout Phase 2, engage “harder-to-reach” populations, who are often not as well-represented in public involvement processes. This includes low- and median-income residents, immigrant residents, people associated with particular racial, ethnic, cultural or language groups, and youth and young adults. We are coordinating these meetings with MCPS contacts and community and neighborhood groups with ties to the target populations. (See further discussion on **page 397**)

Interviews

Throughout the engagement process, we are conducting interviews with stakeholders both inside and outside the school system, who can provide unique insights and perspectives based on the roles they play or positions they hold. (See further discussion and insights on **page 392**)

Online participation

Through online participation, the public at-large is invited to view narrated video presentations of the data explored in public and small group meetings and provide comments and feedback virtually. In some cases, we have also engaged community members through virtual meetings, to ensure greater representation of a particular group (see discussion of student engagement on **page 399**). Online participation enables a broader audience to engage in the process and complements the three strategies above.

Impact of Community Engagement on Analysis

The community engagement activities in this analysis are designed to enable insights from the public to inform the process of data analysis.

Throughout Phase 1, as we presented initial analysis and established shared understanding about the MCPS context and four key lenses at the center of this analysis, we adjusted our work as needed to reflect the concerns, expertise, and questions we heard at meetings.

As we distilled and analyzed the insights from public meetings, we looked for opportunities to incorporate these concerns and insights, and address the public's questions, through the analytical components of this work.



Workshop materials at a regional public meeting at Gaithersburg High School December 04, 2019 (photo credit: C.D. Boykin)

Feedback: Impact On Analysis

This table highlights some of the major impacts of community feedback on this boundary analysis. We encourage you to refer to Section I: Data Analysis for a deeper look at the data analysis.

UTILIZATION		
What we heard	Where we heard this	What did we do?
Concern about the unique circumstances of consortia and school choice, and questions about how this would impact the data analysis	Regional Meetings (White Oak MS, Blair HS); Small Group Meetings	We analyzed consortia and choice schools in each section of analysis to understand their impact on the data. Included explanation and callouts about choice and consortia as applicable in each section. (page 167)
Contextualizing Utilization analysis by 'size of school'	Regional Meetings (Northwest HS)	We included school size in our utilization analysis to contextualize utilization ratios. (page 118)
Desire to understand utilization change over time	Regional Meetings (Julius West MS; White Oak MS)	Utilization section of the report updated to include utilization change over time. (page 147)
How is the utilization analysis factoring in choice, magnets and other specialized programs?	Regional Meetings (Blair HS; Northwest HS)	Utilization analysis text was articulated to clearly state that choice and magnet programs, as well as special geographic cases such as consortia and paired schools, were accounted for in the analysis.
Confusion about how relocatable are factored into this analysis	Regional meetings (White Oak MS, Blaire HS)	Methodology section and appendix items under utilization were updated to explain how relocatable were factored in the analysis. (page 121)

DIVERSITY		
What we heard	Where we heard this	What did we do?
Concerns about using only Ever-FARMS as a metric of diversity	Regional meetings (all); Small Group Meetings	Diversity analysis approach text was articulated to be clearer on the range of analyses being conducted under the diversity lens. In addition to Ever-FARMS, other analyses such as racial dissimilarity and ESOL were also completed. (page 180)

PROXIMITY

What we heard	Where we heard this	What did we do?
Concern and confusion about the number of students who do not attend their closest schools currently	Regional meetings (Gaithersburg HS)	Proximity analysis included 'closest school' analysis for better comprehension of proximity related issues. (page 273),
Recommendation that proximity analysis take population density into account; Desire to know the percentage of students who do not attend the school closest to them at each level	Regional meetings (White Oak MS, Blair HS)	Adjusted closest-school analysis to consider 'closest 3 schools' to provide greater context related to population and school density. (page 280)
Understanding of proximity might differ across geographies with different densities	Regional meetings (White Oak MS, Blair HS)	Our proximity analysis contextualizes average distance by looking at relevant geography as identified by the Montgomery County Planning Department (urban, suburban, and rural tiers). Also contextualizing distance to school by looking at the difference in distance between near schools, not just the nearest school. (page 280)
Concerns how consortia might affect the analysis of boundaries in this project	Regional Meetings (various)	The proximity analysis methodology was articulated to explicitly state our approach when looking at consortia school. (page 312)
Desire to maximize walkers, and put a cap on distance for bussing	Regional Meetings (various)	Proximity section of the study was updated to include an in-depth walkshed analysis. (page 286) The consultant team is currently working with Montgomery Planning Department to overlay their sidewalk analysis, amongst other datasets, to better understand walkability issues per cluster.
This part of the analysis should factor in natural barriers, major roads, etc. (especially as it relates to school walksheds)	Regional Meetings (various)	To better understand potential barriers to walkability, the difference between MCPS defined walkzone and actual walkshed was analyzed. (page 293)

Other (Data Related)

What we heard	Where we heard this	What did we do?
Research student enrollment history, MCPS policy changes over time, and historical shifts in demographics	Interviews	Drew upon historical documents provided by stakeholders interviewed; research informed graphs and timelines related to policy history and demographic change over time. (Section 1, page 52)
Contextualize understanding of the data through county context	Regional Meetings (Gaithersburg; White Oak; Blair); Interviews	Added a section explaining context of Montgomery County including housing and development trends under Section 1: Introduction. (page 63)
Concern that assignment stability is not emphasized as a lens in public meetings	Regional Meetings (various)	Introduction section was articulated to clearly state how assignment stability is being discussed in this report. Additionally, a cohort study was added under the assignment stability section to understand the impacts of boundary changes on student re-assignment. (page 87)



Participants in a table discussion at a regional public meeting at Gaithersburg High School December 04, 2019 (photo credit: C.D. Boykin)

Feedback: Impact On Process

As an iterative and responsive community engagement process, engagement activities also elicited learning and insights that impacted the design of subsequent engagement. The following table highlights some of the major impacts of public feedback on the boundary analysis process itself, including the community engagement activities described in this volume.

PROCESS		
What we heard	Where we heard this	What did we do?
Recurring questions and confusion about the scope, purpose, and approach of the Boundary Analysis	Regional Meetings (Gaithersburg HS, Julius West MS)	Developed a working list of FAQ's which were shared at subsequent public meetings, and posted online
Desire for more time to ask questions directly to consultant team and/or MCPS staff	Regional Meetings (Gaithersburg HS, Julius West)	In addition to general FAQ, added time for Q and A at 5 out of 6 regional community meetings.
Importance of engaging Hispanic communities and other racial groups underrepresented in public meetings	Regional Meetings (White Oak MS, Blair HS); Inter-views (many)	Drew upon these general recommendations, as well as participants' specific ideas related to outreach, in planning of Small Group Meetings; Our team will continue to incorporate this feedback in approach to Phase 2 engagement as well.
Importance of engaging MCPS students in this process	Regional Meetings (all); Interviews (many)	Worked with MCPS to craft student engagement strategy; Planned countywide virtual meeting for students in February; In the process of planning Small Group Meetings to engage additional students.
Differing feedback on data literacy	Regional Meetings (all)	Interim Report content was drafted to address a wide range of audience. For instance, the report provides summary pages for each data analysis section for a shorter read as well as extensive materials in Appendix (page 416) for those interested in more data.
Desire to have digital forums for online inputs; Desire to see all information online to make the process more transparent	Regional Meetings (Gaithersburg HS, Julius West MS)	Worked with MCPS to create digital version of the presentation, handbooks, and online surveys for capturing more feedback.
Need to understand more clearly how consortia will be factored in across the lenses	Regional Meetings (various)	Methodology for each of the analytical sections of the report was articulated to clearly define how consortia model is factored into that analysis.

Feedback: General Clarification

In this process, we have also heard many more general questions and concerns, many of which fall outside the scope of this boundary analysis. Below are some of the recurring concerns that were heard in Phase 1 meetings:

- Concern that the Board will weigh diversity more heavily than the other lenses.
- Concerns about the impacts of travel time on student mental and physical health, academic performance.
- How are Title 1 schools looked at in this analysis?
- Belief that MCPS enrollment projections have been historically flawed or inaccurate.
- Need for strong coordination with county planning office to address population growth and housing growth and its impact on school utilization.
- Desire for clarity on how MCPS determines where to build new schools.
- Concern about what data is being used for the utilization analysis.
- MCPS should increase support for immigrant / ESOL students.
- Desire to understand the relationship between diversity and school/student performance.
- Concern about trying to solve socioeconomic disparities through boundary changes.

Phase 1: Community Engagement

A. Regional Community Meetings Approach

The large regional community meetings served as the centerpiece of the Phase 1 community engagement strategy, with a goal of engaging residents from across the county. These meetings were organized around four components:

- **Focused, concise presentations** by WXY consultants to provide key context, data, and perspective on the key lenses (utilization, diversity, proximity)
- **Small group discussions at tables of approximately 10 participants** to deepen conversation around the key lenses and the intersection among the lenses
- **Notes capturing participant ideas captured by volunteer table facilitators** on worksheets for input on each of the lenses and on other issues, challenges, and opportunities they see
- **Live electronic polling, with keypads for every participant**, to gather participant data and feedback throughout each meeting

Volunteer Table Facilitators. Prior to the public meetings, the consultant team recruited a team of 72 facilitators who volunteered their time to lead discussions at the tables. Many of these volunteers provided this service at more than one meeting, and several them at all the meetings. All volunteer facilitators went through a one-hour phone and web briefing prior to the meetings, as well as a debrief after the meeting. These volunteers were essential to the success of each meeting as they allowed every community participant to be heard, and ensured that their insights, feedback, and questions were captured for later analysis.

Recruitment. Email and web publicity served as the primary vehicle for recruiting participants. All attendees were asked to register ahead of time. From December 4 – January 23, MCPS and WXY held six large public meetings. The consultant team chose large school sites that were well distributed geographically across the county in order to maximize participation in each major geographic region. The dates and locations for the meetings were as follows:

1. Gaithersburg High School, Wednesday, December 4, 7pm-9pm
2. Julius West Middle School, Wednesday, December 11, 7pm-9pm
3. White Oak Middle School, Saturday, December 14, 10am-12noon
4. Blair High School, Saturday, January 11, 10am-12noon
5. Northwest High School, Tuesday, January 14, 7pm-9pm
6. Walter Johnson High School, Thursday, January 23, 7pm-9pm

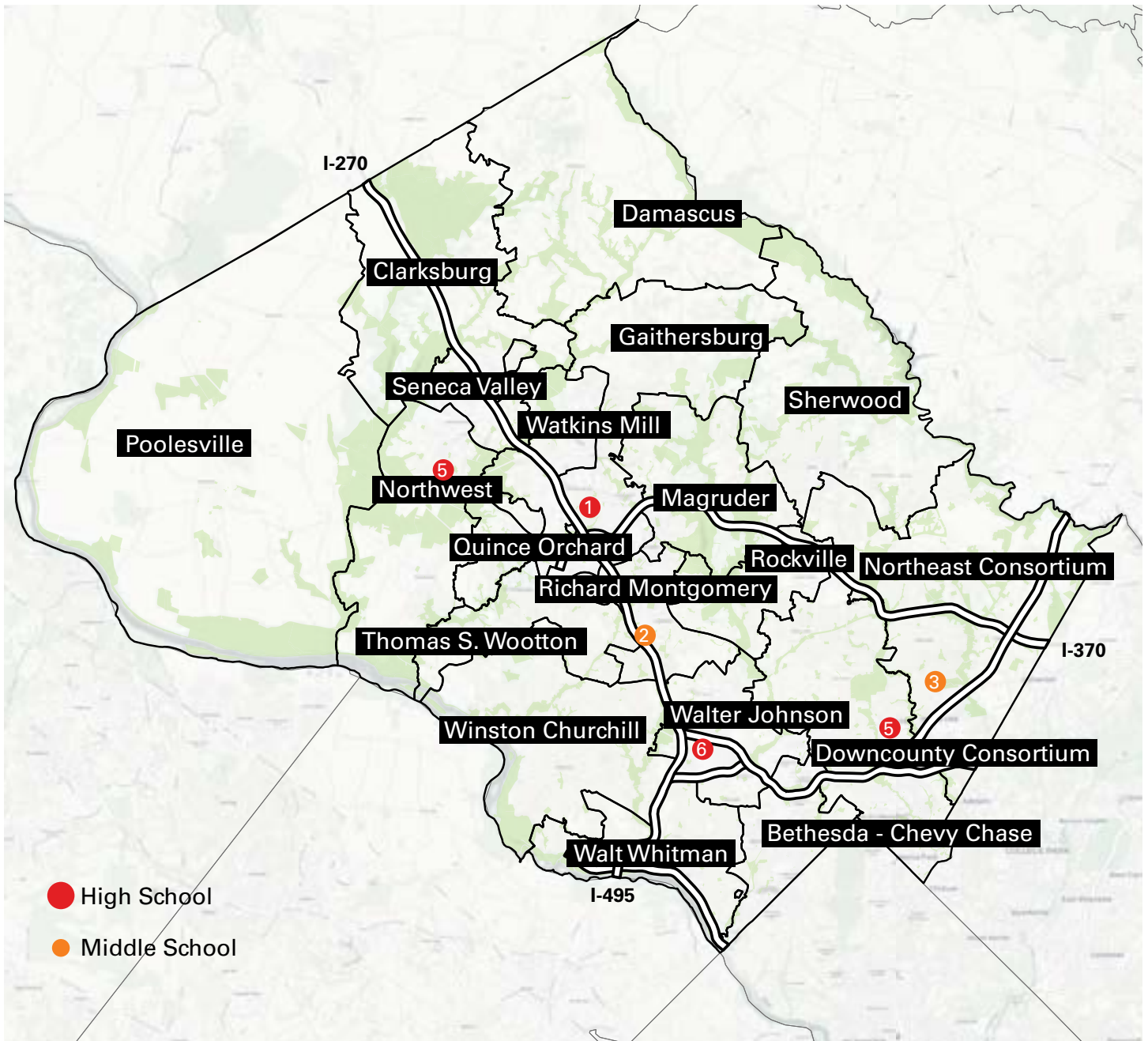


Figure 4.1 Location of Six Community Meetings

Meeting Format

All community meetings were organized to maximize the participation of every person attending. The consultant team arranged the room to have 30-60 tables for participants to sit at, learn, and discuss. Volunteer table facilitators facilitated small group discussions at nearly every table; when a volunteer facilitator was not available, tables of participants were coached to self-facilitate.

All meetings were scheduled as two-hour meetings, although the team adjusted the schedule for the final four meetings to incorporate a 25-45-minute Q&A period at the very end of the meeting, extending these meetings to approximately 2 ½ hours.

What are we doing?

- Focused, concise presentations
- Abbreviated and targeted small group discussions to deepen conversation
- Ideas captured on worksheets by table facilitators for input to future stages of the process
- Polling to gather participant feedback



Every meeting incorporated an opening presentation that provided ¹:

- An overview of the project and project team
- An overview of the meeting agenda, meeting format, and meeting ground rules
- Polling of all participants to gauge more effectively who was in attendance

The opening segment also provided brief time for participants to introduce themselves at the tables.

The majority of the meeting focused on three, presentation-table discussion cycles, one each on school utilization, student body diversity, and proximity to schools. During each table discussion, table facilitators captured the full range of ideas discussed by participants on to facilitator worksheets. These worksheets were handed in at the end of the night.

¹ Due to recurring questions across meetings, in later meetings, consultant team members and/or MCPS staff went through Frequently Asked Questions at the beginning of the meeting. FAQ's were also [posted online](#) in mid-January.

To support table conversations, every participant received a blue booklet that contained all the relevant presentation slides; every table featured a large map of the county organized by school clusters. Participants also received worksheets which they could write on and either keep for themselves or hand in before they departed.

Tables also included a stack of post-it notes on which participants wrote down their questions. At the end of the evening all the questions were collected.

More than 2,000 Montgomery County participants attended the meetings:

1. Gaithersburg High School, approximately 300 community members
2. Julius West Middle School, approximately 400 community members
3. White Oak Middle School, approximately 225 community members
4. Blair High School, Saturday, approximately 400 community members
5. Northwest High School, approximately 375 community members
6. Walter Johnson High School, approximately 550 community members

Materials gathered at each meeting include:

- Facilitator worksheets from each table with responses to all questions discussed at the tables
- Worksheets from those participants who wished to submit them
- Post-its from participants who submitted questions (or comments) during or at the end of the meeting
- Polling results from five of the six meetings (all but Julius West MS, where the length of Q&A prevented us from asking any polling questions)

Analysis Methodology

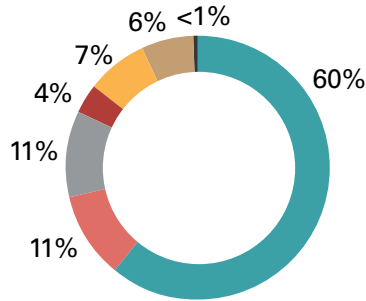
After each meeting, the consultant team produced a meeting report, including a summary of participant comments and live polling results. All qualitative data captured by facilitators was compiled into an Excel spreadsheet, then analyzed and themed. The team also collated and compiled all questions submitted on post-it notes, then categorized questions by theme.

Summary reports from each meeting can be found in Community Engagement **Appendix 1A: Regional Community Meeting Summary Reports on page 531** .

Polling Summary – Area-Wide Community Meetings

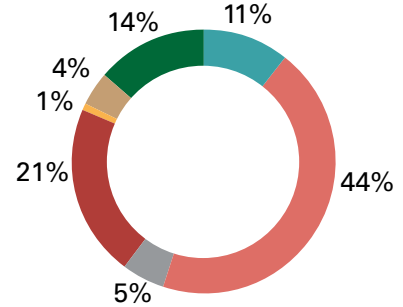
Summary of all meetings

Q1. Select all of those that apply to you:



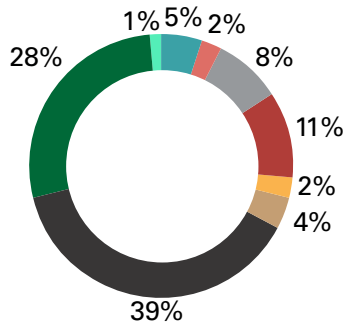
- I am a Pre-K-12 student but not in MCPS
- I am a Pre-K-12 student in MCPS
- I don't have children but care about our county
- I am a parent/guardian of children of Pre-K-12 age in private schools
- I am a parent/guardian who used to have children in MCPS
- I am a parent/guardian with kids who are not in MCPS
- I am a parent/guardian with kids currently in MCPS

Q3. I consider myself:



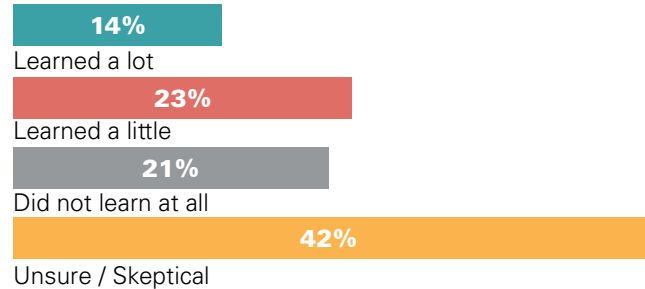
- African-American/Black
- Caucasian/White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Asian American or Pacific Islander
- Native American
- More than One race
- I don't care to say

Q2. Which of these best describes where you live:

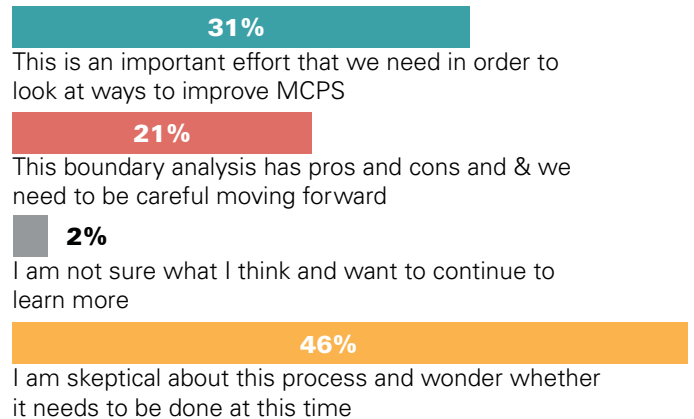


- Southeast: in the vicinity of Colesville, Fairland + Burtonsville
- South: In the vicinity of Sliver Spring, Takoma Park, Wheaton + White Oak
- Southwest: In the vicinity of Bethesda, Chevy Chase + Potomac
- East: In the vicinity of Colesville, Fairland + Burtonsville
- Central: In the vicinity of of Rockville + Derwood
- North Central: In the vicinity of Gaithersburg + Montgomery Village
- Northeast: In the vicinity of Damascus + Clarksburg
- Northwest: In the vicinity of Poolsville, Dickerson, Boyds + Germantown
- I live outside Montgomery County, but connected to the county in other ways

Q4. Which statement best describes your experience in terms of how much you learned:

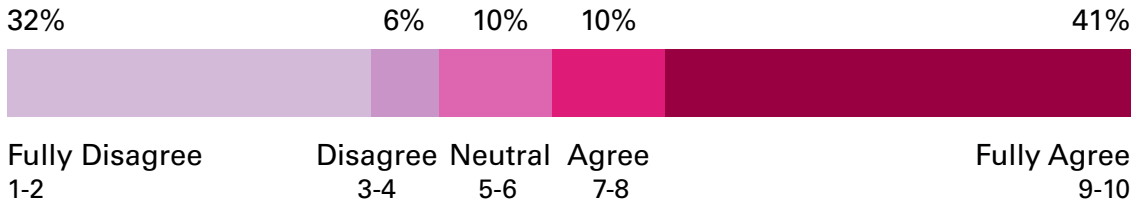


Q5. Which statement best summarizes your view of the MCPS boundary analysis:



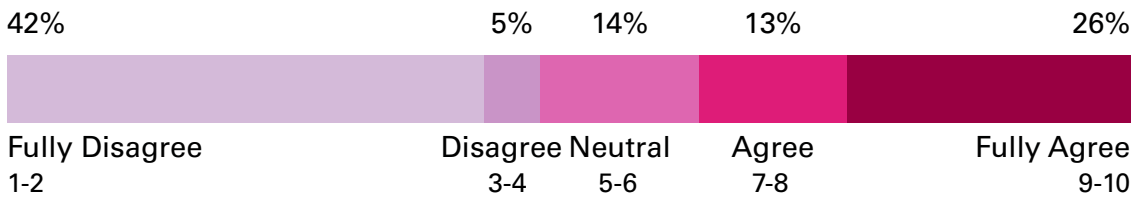
Summary of all meetings (Continued)

Q6. Is it a good idea to review the school boundaries occasionally to make sure they are up to date with the growth of the district? (Scale of 1-10) (multiple choice)



This question was asked in Jan 11th, Jan14th and Jan 23rd.

Q7. I have felt heard today and have had a chance to express my views, hopes, and concerns. (Scale 1-10) (multiple choice)



This question was asked in Jan 11th, Jan14th and Jan 23rd.

As part of the structure of regional community meetings, attendees participated in live polling, using keypads to respond to prompts at various points throughout the evening. Some polling questions related to participant identity and affinities, in order to give us a sense of who we were reaching in public meetings, and whose perspectives were underrepresented. Other polling questions related to participants' views on the boundary analysis (for instance, Is it a good idea to review the school boundaries occasionally to make sure they are up to date with the growth of the district?). Yet other questions solicited feedback about participants' experience in public meetings (for instance, Did you feel heard today, like you had a chance to express your ideas, wishes and concerns?).

The data from this live polling is not a perfect science. Additionally, live polling was not intended to be decisive or representative of any specific community or viewpoint. These are illustrative insights only and are not used for a more concrete purpose in this process. Due to technical difficulties, user error, and the addition and subtraction of certain questions over the course of the public meetings, the polling data has limitations. However, the insights of live polling data can provide an interesting picture of who attended regional public meetings, and what some of the overriding perspectives were among these attendees.

Regional Meeting Polling Insights

Insight: Approximately 67% of all meeting participants say that they reside in the Southwest (in the vicinity of Bethesda, Chevy Chase, and Potomac) or South of the county (in the vicinity of Silver Spring, Takoma Park, Wheaton, and White Oak).

Insight: The vast majority of participants –86%–identified as parents, however only about 60% of these parents currently have children enrolled in MCPS. Much less represented in these meetings were MCPS students who made up only 6% of polling participants.

Insight: In terms of racial identity, Hispanic/Latino and African American residents were strongly underrepresented among polling participants in the regional meetings as compared to their percentage of the total county population (around 20% and 18%, respectively). White and Asian American participants attended meetings in numbers that more closely mirror their percentage of the total county population.

Insight: While 37% of participants learned a little or a lot during these public meetings, 42% said they were either unclear or skeptical about what they had learned.

Insight: Finally, while almost a third of participants (31%) expressed outright support for the Boundary Analysis process, 46% of participants expressed skepticism about the process and its need to be done at this time.

(continued on next page)

What We Heard: Overview of Participant Feedback

After each public meeting, our team transcribed the qualitative data from the facilitator worksheets (one from each table) into an Excel spreadsheet, organized by the topics from the meeting. Across the six meetings, nearly 4,000 comments were transcribed.

Our team wrote a 4-6-page summary report for each meeting, identifying the ideas that occurred the most frequently in each category (e.g., school utilization, student body diversity, proximity to schools, etc.)

After our team completed all six reports, we looked in each category at the recurring themes, which you can find below. Comments are organized according to the themes presented and discussed at regional public meetings: school utilization, student body diversity, proximity to schools, the intersection of the lenses, and other comments that participants felt MCPS should be aware of. The fourth lens of our analytical framework, stability of student assignment, was mentioned in meetings but not discussed at length. This is due to the fact that assignment stability is a result of boundary changes over time and is dependent on the first three lenses which speak to the current conditions of school boundaries in MCPS¹.

Please note that this qualitative analysis attempts to capture the ideas, opinions, and perspectives shared by participants without looking to explain, validate, or justify any of them. The summary of comments that follows reflects the comments of participants at public meetings in Phase 1.

Comments from each area-wide community meeting, along with disaggregated live polling data, can be found in the meeting reports in **Appendix 1A: Regional Community Meeting Summary Reports 531**.

Lens #1 - School Utilization

Participants surfaced a number of key challenges over the course of their conversations in the six meetings. Many observed not only how much the county's population has grown, but also how this growth impacts the school utilization. Thus, an important theme was to urge the school

¹ For further discussion of assignment stability as a part of this boundary analysis, see Section I: Data Analysis, pages 76

Regional Meeting Polling Insights (continued)

While question 6 (It is a good idea to review school boundaries occasionally to make sure they are up to date with the growth of the district), and 7 (I have felt heard today and have had a chance to express my views, hopes, and concerns) were only asked at half of the regional meetings, it is worth mentioning that these polling questions seem to suggest that a majority of participants at this meeting agree with the need to occasionally review school boundaries, and a majority of these participants did not feel that they were heard or had a chance to express their views at these meetings.



system to coordinate effectively with county planning officials to stay on top of growth, including where development is occurring, and how much development is upcoming.

Population growth directly affects enrollment and enrollment projections. Participants emphasized the need to ensure that MCPS'S enrollment projections are as accurate as possible. Many participants urged that--given the volume of growth the county has experienced and will continue to experience – school constructions and additions will need to continue, if not accelerate.

Many participants expressed concern about the frequent use of relocatables (portables) at schools, even at schools that were recently constructed. Participants were particularly concerned about the perceived overutilization of many elementary schools.

Participants raised questions about how magnet, specialized, and choice schools impact utilization across the county, and whether moving and/or expanding those programs might have a positive impact on currently underutilized schools. Participants also expressed concern about how consortium schools impact MCPS utilization data.

Participants also wondered how utilization is connected (or not) to student academic performance or the quality of the academic programs at schools, how utilization intersects with student-teacher ratios across the school system, and, how it intersects with students' and schools' access to resources.

Lens #2 - Diversity

Perhaps one of the clearest themes at all six meetings was the concern many participants had with the use of Ever-FARMS as a metric for analyzing student body diversity. In general, many participants expressed confusion about how diversity was being defined for this analysis and many indicated a need for a broad range of variables to measure diversity be incorporated into this analysis including racial diversity, cultural diversity, country of origin and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).

There was also a clear acknowledgment across meetings that students who are Ever-FARMS and schools with high Ever-FARMS rates require more support and resources than other students and schools.

Participants considered the idea that FARMS students might be moved in future boundary changes to schools with lower FARMS rates, or that non-FARMS students might move to schools with higher FARMS rates. Some participants raised concerns about the impact this would have on student performance--both for those who moved and on overall school performance.

Participants also expressed a need to better understand the interplay between student body diversity and proximity as well as diversity and school utilization. There were a range of comments focused on how diversity intersects with new housing construction, home values, school location, and future school construction.

Finally, there was a concern, given the 2018 update to Policy FAA, that diversity would be weighed most heavily in this analysis, above utilization and proximity.

Lens #3 - Proximity to Schools

In most public meetings, proximity to schools was emphasized most frequently as the most important lens to participants. However, other participants expressed the opposite. Many participants expressed concerns that the analysis would not incorporate travel time or traffic patterns and emphasized the need for the analysis to include both.

Participants underscored that long and/or increased travel times have numerous consequences, impacting before-school care, after-school care, extracurricular activities, sleep time, work commutes for parents, etc. Parents also shared concerns about longer bus rides to schools much further away than their children's current schools and also highlighted concerns about safety on buses (e.g., no seat belts) and environmental (e.g., burning more fossil fuels) and cost consequences (more buses, more bus drivers, more fuel expenses, etc.) of long bus routes.

Participants also observed population growth and the location of new development as drivers of potential changes to proximity.

As well, participants expressed confusion about the relationship in this analysis between proximity calculations and magnet, choice, and consortia.

Finally, many attendees wanted to remind MCPS that families choose where they live based on where schools are located.

Intersection of the Lenses

Table discussions about the intersection of the lenses varied within and across meetings. Many participants believed all lenses should be considered equally, while also acknowledging practical obstacles to this in the event of a specific boundary study. Others noted that lenses might need to be utilized differently at the level of a school's boundaries, a specific cluster's boundaries, and across levels of schooling (i.e., elementary, middle, and high). Still others made an additional appeal to weigh proximity most heavily in the analysis.

Participants also expressed concern be given to how boundary changes can have genuine negative impact on students, families, and neighborhoods.

Participants continued to emphasize the need to integrate quality education and outcomes in some way into the analysis while also expressing a lack of clarity about what specific metrics will be used in the analysis.

The Boundary Analysis Process

Many participants arrived at the public meetings with concerns, curiosity, and misconceptions about the boundary analysis process itself. By the third meeting, our team worked with MCPS to plan a short, opening presentation to answer questions about purpose and outcomes for the analysis and answer other frequently asked questions.

However, despite these efforts, participants continued to share their concerns about the analysis' purpose and outcomes. Participants at each meeting also expressed mistrust they have of the Board of Education and what they see as a lack of transparency on this process (and on other actions).

A significant number of questions were raised about the data that was being used to analyze the data, the breadth and depth of the data being studied, and whether the raw data would be publicly shared. These concerns were paired with questions raised about the scope of the boundary analysis project, and whether recommendations would be a critical result of the analysis (some wanted recommendations; many others did not).

Finally, participants recommended that Phase 1 should also include opportunities for residents to engage online, especially if they couldn't attend a meeting and that the process needed to include and engage underrepresented populations (including Hispanic residents, immigrant groups, and current high school students).

What Else Does MCPS Need to Know?

"What else does MCPS need to know?" served as the last discussion question posed at every public meeting. This served as a final opportunity for participants to share what still lingered for them as the meeting moved toward adjournment.

This question provided an opportunity for many issues and concerns already raised to be brought to the fore, such as concerns about students being bused long distances, dismay over the recent Clarksburg-Seneca Valley boundary decision, a desire to see quality education and student and school performance woven into this analysis, worries about the impact of population growth on enrollment, and a need to study how resources are distributed across schools, among others.

What We Heard:

Summary of Comments from Regional Meetings

Lens #1 - School Utilization

Intersection with land use, development, and population growth

- This analysis takes place in a much larger county context that includes county housing policy, transportation policy, and current and future development
- MCPS must be ready to figure out what happens when more growth occurs in areas that are already overcrowded
- Utilization challenges are tied to ongoing development in the county; perception that this is a result of “poor planning” (on the part of the county, school system)
- Population growth is occurring, especially in areas of the county where development is more intensive
- Population growth is growing particularly fast with the Latino population in the county, and this is impacting school utilization particularly in neighborhoods where many Latino residents have settled
- Population growth seems to be outpacing the construction of new schools
- Utilization is impacted by new developments, the density of housing in certain parts of the county, and a lack of affordable housing; in many parts of the county, development doesn’t align well with school utilization
- Need for strong coordination with county planning office to address population growth and housing growth and its impact on school utilization

Concern with MCPS’s enrollment projections

- Belief that MCPS enrollment projections have been historically flawed or inaccurate
- Many believe that MCPS’ projections tend to be underestimated
- Desire for MCPS to improve its accuracy in projecting or predicting future population growth and enrollment growth
- Desire for MCPS enrollment projections to factor in future development and population growth in the county
- Concerned about poor planning of schools and utilization in the face of the county’s population growth; need to project more accurately and further out into the future

Need for more school construction and/or school expansion

- MCPS needs to build more schools; and be clear about how and when that happens
- MCPS needs more coordinated and better planning around school construction and expansion
- MCPS needs to continuously plan for expansion of the school system – specifically expansion of existing schools

Need to include student-teacher ratios in the analysis

- Need to understand the relationship between over-/under-utilization and the deployment of teachers (& staff) across the school system
- Desire to see student-teacher ratios included in this analysis
- Need to understand better how student-teacher ratios and class size intersect with utilization in both over and underutilized schools
- Questions about student-teacher ratios, class sizes, and their relationship to utilization

Desire to understand how MCPS actions (recent & historical) lead to under/over-utilization

- A number of clusters look like they have been gerrymandered
- Not clear why the “islands” have occurred in the first place and why MCPS still has them
- Not clear how underutilization nor overutilization occur – need to understand better the history of decisions that led to this
- Overcrowding in schools appears to be more prevalent in Downcounty
- Lack of clarity about why there is underutilization in any schools
- Disparities in utilization appear to be based on geography
- Wonder whether there is a relationship between under-utilization and the age of (older) facilities
- Wonder how much longer older facilities will be able to be used as schools

Need to understand the connections between utilization, student success, and academic quality

- Interest in whether there is a correlation between overcrowding/overutilization and student success

- Assertion that programs drive enrollment (quality, quantity, type, etc.), which needs to be factored into analysis
- Unclear about how utilization intersects with student performance
- Wonder whether there is a relationship between lower performing schools and under-utilized schools
- If moving students due to utilization needs, school system needs to ensure minimal disruption for students impacted by that
- Consider how to increase academic quality across the schools
- Concern and uncertainty about whether future boundary changes will really impact academic quality and performance positively and solve current disparities

Concern about overuse of relocatables (i.e. portables)

- Concern about use of relocatables throughout the system, even in schools perceived to be underutilized
- Concern about extensive and long-term use of relocatables at numerous schools; also, confusion about how relocatables are factored into this analysis
- Concern about why there are so many relocatables/portables being used

Concern about overcrowded elementary schools

- Elementary schools have the biggest overcrowding challenges
- Concern about overcrowding in a number of elementary schools
- Perception that there are numerous overutilized elementary schools near underutilized elementary schools

Desire to understand the intersection of utilization and specialized/choice programs

- Not clear how utilization intersects or is affected by MCPS choice, magnet, and other specialized programs
- Wonder whether some of these programs (choice, magnet, etc.) should be moved to underutilized schools

Factor in where families choose to buy homes in utilization analysis

- Parents chose to purchase homes based on nearby school locations – many participants do not want that to change

- People move to areas where schools are better, which leads to overcrowding
- Families purchase houses based on the location of schools and that reality should be considered in this analysis

Desire to understand how utilization intersects with access to resources

- Unclear about how utilization intersects with access to resources
- MCPS needs to allocate resources for schools more effectively
- Unclear about how utilization intersects with Ever-FARMS rates
- Need to dedicate more resources (teachers, programs, etc.) to underutilized schools

Other Themed Comments

- Concern about the possibility of forced busing in the future as a result of boundary changes to balance utilization
- Need to analyze boundaries more regularly to prevent the problem of over- and under-utilization
- Concern about what data is being used for the utilization analysis

Lens #2 - Student Body Diversity

Concerns about Ever FARMS as a measure of diversity

- MCPS needs to factor in far more than FARMS data regarding diversity
- Concerned that MCPS is using too narrow a definition for diversity
- Question whether Ever-FARMS is the right variable to use for diversity
- Skeptical about (and, in some cases, opposed to) the use of FARMS-related/socioeconomic status data
- Concern that FARMS is not a real or reliable indicator of socioeconomic status

Desire for a broad definition of diversity in this analysis

- Recommend that other diversity factors could include – race, gender, ethnicity, religion, children with disabilities and who need special education, ESOL, country of origin, family education background, etc.
- Belief that dimensions like cultural diversity are more important than socioeconomic diversity

- Need to use other diversity measures instead of or in addition to Ever FARMS; especially racial diversity (“race rather than poverty”)
- Desire to see other factors measured in diversity analysis, including racial and cultural diversity, ESOL, and special needs populations
- Desire for a common understanding of what is meant by diversity in this analysis

More support for Ever FARMS students and schools with high FARMS rates

- Desire for MCPS to provide more resources to schools that serve high percentages of Ever-FARMS students
- MCPS should increase support for immigrant/ESOL populations
- Desire to see resources provided more equitably across the school system
- Belief that there is a stigma associated with FARMS (including assumption that high-FARMS schools are underperforming)

Need to understand the connection between diversity and student performance

- Concern about what happens to a student’s performance when they move from a high performing school to a low performing one.
- Certain parts of the county have greater concentrations of diversity than others
- Wonder whether there is a correlation between FARMS and school performance
- Desire to understand the relationship between diversity and school/student performance
- Lack of belief in research cited by meeting handouts that increased diversity has positive impact on school performance

Where diversity and ever-FARMS are prominent in MCPS

- It appears that there are higher Ever-FARMS rates at the elementary school level
- Certain parts of the county have greater concentrations of diversity than others
- Desire to understand the history of boundary decisions and how it relates to the varying Ever-FARMS rates across schools

Desire to understand better the impact of housing construction, housing location, and property values on diversity

- Desire to understand how new home construction impacts diversity in MCPS schools
- Would like to see the interrelationship between school location and property values
- The county (and MCPS) needs to balance new housing development with the need for more or expanded schools
- Concern that an increase in Ever-FARMS students in schools could cause students/families to move or go to school elsewhere (e.g., private schools)

Need to determine the validity of how moving students impacts academic performance

- Concerned about the validity of the data that proves moving students from low to high performing schools improves grades; and vice versa
- Concern about whether the data actually proves that moving students from low to high performing schools improves grades; and vice versa
- Skeptical about lack of discussion of FARMS, specifically, in diversity research

Socioeconomic disparities and boundary changes

- Desire to improve education/academic programs in all schools rather than trying to do it through boundary changes
- Concern about trying to solve socioeconomic disparities through boundary changes

Desire to understand the linkage between ever-FARMS rates and school utilization

- Need to understand how over- and under-utilization intersects with the lack of diversity in schools where that is the case
- Want to know if there is a link between Ever-FARMS/socioeconomic data and overcrowded schools

Need to understand the relationship between diversity and proximity

- Need to understand how diversity intersects with proximity
- Concerns about FARMS students being burdened in future boundary changes

Need to expand choice and magnet programs in ways that attract diverse students

- Belief that there is low participation in specialized programs by racial/ethnic minorities and students with low socioeconomic status
- Need to expand choice and magnet programs to be more inclusive of the full school system population, especially students of color, immigrant students, lower-income students

Concern that the Board will weigh diversity more heavily than the other lenses (in future boundary studies and changes)

- Desire for clarity about the Board weighing diversity more heavily (based on recent update to policy FAA), while in this analysis diversity is treated equally with the other lenses

Diversity and fears of bussing

- Concerns that MCPS efforts to distribute diversity more evenly will lead to bussing students across the county

MCPS is already perceived as diverse

- Schools are already perceived as diverse (racially)
- Recognize that the County is already very diverse and so is MCPS

Lens #3 - Proximity to Schools

Concerns about bussing and/or increased travel time

- Fear that county is considering forced bussing as an outcome of this analysis
- Major concerns around potential of increased travel time
- Concerns about the secondary impact that increased travel time has on commutes, including time for family and after-school activities.
- Concern regarding the impact of potential increased bus time on issues like before-school care, after-school care, extracurricular programs, parental engagement, etc.
- Desire to include traffic and travel time in this analysis, and make it a priority

High importance of proximity

- Many participants stress that proximity is the most important issue in this analysis. It impacts:
 1. Quality of life
 2. Commutes

3. Participation in after school activities

- MCPS needs to make a commitment to neighborhood schools
- Proximity is especially important at the elementary school level
- Belief that proximity leads to better parent engagement
- Place a high value on community schools (“assign kids to closer schools”)
- Proximity should be considered the primary lens in this analysis

Desire for travel time and traffic to factor into this analysis

- Proximity must include travel time to school
- Need to not just look at distance but time factors too
- Must consider traffic patterns into this part of the analysis, including mileage, travel time, and travel patterns
- Traffic is more indicative of proximity than distance; need to account for driving/travel/bus time

Relationship of proximity to school choice & consortia

- Desire to ensure that magnet and specialty programs (and consortia) fit into this analysis
- Lack of clarity about the relationship between proximity to schools and a family’s willingness to travel (e.g., school choice programs)
- Consortia are important in the school system, but concerns how they might affect the analysis of boundaries in this project
- Desire to understand how magnet and specialized programs factor into proximity

Challenge of population growth and new housing and developments

- Suggestions that this analysis look at where housing growth and development (current and planned) will occur in the county
- Desire to understand the impact of development and population growth on proximity to schools
- Desire for clarity on how MCPS determines where to build new schools
- Negative impact of travel time on students/families
- Proximity to schools and the amount of travel time required to get to schools can have a big impact on family and student well-being
- Travel distance to schools often has the biggest impact on those families/

students with the fewest resources

- Desire to maximize walkers, and put a cap on distance for bussing

Student safety for bussing and walking

- Students thrive where they feel safe and comfortable
- Desire to emphasize the safety of children in decisions being made
- Safety is an issue not just on buses (concern about lack of seatbelts; more time on bus means increased likelihood of accidents) but also on walking/ walkability and how safe it is to expect children to walk to school in the case of certain schools and routes

Concerned about environmental factors

- Measure the costs to the environment of bussing
- Concern about the environmental impact of additional bussing

What else should be factored in?

- Need to factor in bike routes, walk routes, use of public transportation, availability of safe paths
- Bussing time matters, and perhaps matters as much if not more than walk sheds
- Desire to know the percentage of students who do not attend the school closest to them at each level
- Would like to see the historical data on proximity to schools
- Buses are a problem – they run late; not enough drivers; breakdowns; they also cause pollution
- Perception that the (school cluster) maps show clusters that look like the boundaries have been gerrymandered
- This part of the analysis should factor in natural barriers, major roads, etc. (especially as it relates to school walksheds)
- Dislike for the reality of split articulation in the school system
- Concern and confusion about the number of students who do not attend their closest schools currently
- Desire that, if students are moved in future boundary changes, they be kept in the same cluster

Intersection of the Lenses¹

Lenses should be of equal weight

- All lenses should be of equal weight (this comment was often stressed in relation to the 2018 update to Policy FAA, emphasizing diversity)
- Desire for all lenses to be balanced, but recognition that they may be difficult to weigh equally
- Concern about whether it is possible for all 3 lenses to be treated equally

Understanding the impacts and differences of the three lenses

- Desire to understand the impact of 3 lenses together and the resources required
- Desire to understand the differences for how the three lenses intersect by school, cluster, and different school levels (i.e., elementary, middle, high)
- All three lenses are important, but it is hard to determine how to align as they are likely to be in conflict or counteracting one another

Analysis should have a special emphasis on proximity

- Concerns about the possibility of future bussing
- Desire to preserve neighborhood/community schools
- Strong interest in seeing proximity prioritized as compared to the other lenses
- Desire to ensure MCPS studies impact of traffic in proximity analysis

Include a focus on education quality in this analysis

- Need to equalize resources so all students have same opportunity to a great education
- While conducting this analysis, need to keep in mind the importance of providing high quality education for all students, and there was concern that the focus on data did not make clear the links to what would improve schools
- Lack of clarity on where student performance, quality of education, school performance fits in – and concerned that metrics being used do not measure quality

¹ Note: regional public meetings focused on the three lenses of utilization, diversity, and proximity. The fourth lens, assignment stability, is an outcome of the first three, as it relates to the changes of boundaries over time and geography. For more discussion and analysis of assignment stability, see page 77.

Impact of boundary changes on students and families

- Concern that boundary changes will have a negative impact on students and families due to assumption that boundary changes will include busing and moving students over longer distances
- Concerns about losing parental and community involvement if students attend schools further away
- Concerns about the impact of future boundary changes on home and property values

Assignment stability as a lens

- Concern that assignment stability is not emphasized as a lens in public meetings
- Assignment stability is an important lens

Concerned and lack of clarity about metrics for analysis

- Desire to know what metrics will be used for diversity and proximity (as has already been done for utilization)
- Concerned about Ever- FARMS as a measure – unsure whether it is an accurate or valid measure
- Need to see metrics and thresholds for both diversity and proximity

How consortia factors into the analysis

- Need to understand more clearly how consortia will be factored in across the lenses

Other feedback

- Must include new housing and commercial development (i.e., future growth) in the analysis – when and where it will occur; also, the need for affordable housing in the county
- Need to do better planning around schools and school construction
- Diversity doesn't belong as a lens
- Need to consider safety issues in this part of the analysis
- Need to invest more resources for schools that need them

Boundary Analysis Process

Lack of clarity about purpose and outcomes about the boundary analysis

- The difference between boundary change versus bus-in/bus-out
- Why the Board is doing this analysis, i.e., about what problem it is trying to solve
- When decisions will be made as a result of this analysis nor how those decisions will be made, or what happens next, after the report is submitted
- What the process will be to make specific boundary changes
- What the end result will be of this analysis – “everybody knows something will happen”
- What the need is for the analysis, the need for a consultant, and what the qualifications of the selected consultant are
- What the ultimate goal of this analysis is
- Unclear why the Board is doing this analysis, i.e., what problem it is trying to solve
- Not clear about what happens next, after analysis is completed

Trust and transparency challenges with the BOE

- People don't trust the MCPS Board of Education
- Desire for more transparency regarding the whole process and the data; desire for the data to be made public
- Desire for this process and for MCPS to be more transparent with parents; don't currently trust the school system
- The Board's lack of transparency broadly in its actions and decisions and around boundary studies and this analysis
- Skeptical about the intentions of the Board of Education in this process and whether the public can trust what they're communicating
- Because of recent actions and decisions, there is a distrust of the school system

Concerns about lack of MCPS transparency

- Desire for more transparency in this process and the analysis itself
- Desire to see all information online to make the process more transparent

The need to involve and engage underrepresented (including student) populations

- Need to directly involve hard-to-reach groups, especially populations for whom English is a second language
- Need to reach out to the Latino community to engage in this process
- Need to reach out to a wide range of students to provide input into this process
- Make sure you engage with underrepresented groups/populations and target harder-to-reach communities, especially Latinos
- Desire to see more student voices in this process

Concerns with the data

- Concerned about the data and the model – not complex enough, not clear about the data sources, nor how the data will be used
- Concerns about how data is collected
- Desire to see all the data; lack of trust in the data at this point; perception that the data is misleading or manipulative
- Desire to know how the data will be analyzed
- Desire for the data to be made public
- Concerns about the origin of the data, including the sources and age of the data

Concerns about project scope and contract

- Concerns about the boundary analysis scope and contract (including both participants who expressed that the scope is too large or worried it would reach too far; and participants who expressed that the scope is too narrow and should include boundary recommendations)
- Concerned about the amount of money invested in this analysis

Desire for boundary analysis to result in recommendations

- Desire to see recommendations on boundaries, given that MCPS is investing so much money in the analysis
- Desire to see recommendations on boundaries, based on the need and a lack of comprehensive analyses in the past

Need for online engagement

- Need an online forum for this analysis

- If engagement is conducted online, make sure data is not skewed by highly organized groups during that part of the process

Other process concerns

- Concern that options and recommendations will be provided on boundaries because that is what the scope on the website says
- Concerns about the timeline: this process is moving too fast; finishing by June is too soon
- Dislike of the polling question about number of boundary changes from past 25 years (first meeting only); participants felt manipulated
- Loudest people in the room (second meeting only) took over in disrespectful way; perception that this was rude and obnoxious
- Dislike for the polling question asking about “occasional boundary analysis” because participants felt that the question was poorly defined.

What Else Does MCPS Need to Know?

Concerns about students being moved to schools further away

- Participants fear having to send kids to schools that are not near their neighborhoods; people chose houses/neighborhoods largely because of the schools their kids would go to
- Concerns about possibility of future bussing in the county

Concerns raised about performance and quality education

- Would like to know how boundary analysis intersects with school and student performance
- Concern that MCPS is not focused on quality of education in this process

Concerns raised about travel time

- We believe travel time should be included in this analysis as a part of proximity
- Concerned that the analysis is not looking at travel time or traffic

Concern and dismay about the Clarksburg – Seneca Valley process and decision

- Upset about the decisions re: Clarksburg/Seneca Valley boundary study; and how those decisions were made; this increased distrust
- Concerns about the recent Clarksburg/Seneca Valley decision

Other issues to study and incorporate into analysis

- Desire to understand how choice and magnet programs are factored in
- Desire to look at how resources are distributed across schools
- Desire to understand more clearly what the impact of future population growth will be on MCPS and boundaries

Strategy 2: Interview

B. Interviews Approach

During Phase 1, we utilized interviews and conversations with community stakeholders to guide our approach to public engagement and data analysis. While these interviews and conversations represented the initiation of a Phase 1 “Ideas Gathering” process, their purpose was primarily to inform our outreach to other key stakeholders, “hard-to-reach” groups, and the general public. The interviews also provided us with a foundational understanding of local history and context from a variety of points-of-view. This understanding of MCPS’s historical challenges as well as the education system’s current planning and policy context allowed us to direct our data analysis around proximity, diversity, and utilization. Their insights also helped to inform the design of public workshops, small group meetings, and virtual engagement.

During Phase 1, we spoke to 21 community members in an effort to guide our Phase 1 community engagement and data analysis approach. Of these 21 conversations, 13 followed the long-form interview format that can be found in the appendix (see **Appendix 2A: Interviews – Format and Questions on page 564**). Each interview began with a brief of the goals and purpose of the Districtwide Boundary Analysis. This introduction was followed by a series of open-ended questions and long-form responses by interviewees about challenges and opportunities for utilization, diversity and proximity, as well as representation and participation of additional stakeholders. This format ensured that we could gather detailed feedback on the four lenses from Policy FAA, in addition to insights on local history, political context, and community outreach recommendations. The remaining conversations focused on introducing stakeholders to the process, listening to specific concerns about MCPS, and gathering feedback on additional stakeholders to consult.

The 21 community members whom we interviewed or consulted represent a small selection of: MCPS Board Members, County Council staff and officials, elected officials, MCPS administrative staff, MCPS educators (current and former), policy experts, community leaders, and other community members. These stakeholders were selected collaboratively by WXY, PEA, and MCPS based on input from MCPS. The team will continue to interview stakeholders in phase 2.

What We Heard: Common Themes in Interviews

In addition to gathering feedback on public outreach strategies and stakeholders, the interviews focused on participants’ reactions to the study’s analytical lenses, with a focus on the primary three lenses analyzed most extensively in this report: Utilization, Diversity and Proximity. The most common themes raised by interviewees included the following:

Utilization

- **Overcrowding:** Concerns about students who have been injured in overcrowded hallways, music classes being conducted in hallways, and inadequate spaces for teachers to work and store materials.
- **Class Sizes:** Discussions of the correlation between small class sizes and student success, with additional insights on the level of teaching experience needed to manage an overcrowded class.
- **Facilities:** Concerns that investment in facilities improvement is imbalanced across the county, with a disproportionate number of old Downcounty schools whose need for renovations have been neglected in favor of new school construction or additions.
- **Population Growth:** Discussion of the burden that population growth has on school capacity, as well as misconceptions about where that growth is concentrated (not in high rises). One interviewee raised concern that capital funds are insufficient to keep up with growth.

Diversity

- **Disparities:** Reflections on the disparities that exist between PTA fundraising efforts at various schools, and the resulting disparities in student resources.
- **Restorative Justice and Practices:** Reflections on the impacts of racially or economically biased behavior management practices in classrooms, and the strategies that would be required to mitigate those biased practices.
- **Integration:** Arguments for integration that focused on the negative impacts of isolating communities geographically or in specialized programs. And arguments against integration that questioned the value of diversity in education.
- **Representation:** Recommendations on how to get greater representation from “hard to reach” communities, as well as concerns about the lack of racial diversity among teaching staff.
- **Specialized Programs:** The success of language immersion programs in encouraging diverse classrooms, compared to issues of segregation that have resulted from magnet, AP, and IB program policies.

Proximity

- **Housing Patterns:** How housing segregation poses a great challenge to integrating schools without increasing travel times.
- **Willingness to Travel:** How families are more willing to travel to schools with coveted reputations or specialized programs.

- Distance from School: A discussion of misconceptions about how many students are assigned to their closest school.

Intersection of the Lenses¹

- Integration: The history of resistance to integration in Montgomery County, and board decisions that have exacerbated segregation.
- Transparency: Frustrations among community members that, although MCPS hears them, they still feel ignored.
- Budgets and Spending: Frustrations with resource disparities, perceived disconnects between school budgets and academic findings, and students who are not covered by Title I funding.
- Assignment Stability: Frustrations with the negative impact of consortiums on student experiences.

What We Heard: Summary of Comments

Below, we have included a summary of key comments that arose during our conversations about each of the three lenses that were addressed during our Phase 1 community engagement process.

Lens #1 - Utilization

Overall, interview participants were concerned about school capacity, and no comments detracted from the importance of addressing this lens. Most comments focused on the negative impacts of overcrowding on teaching and the safety of students. One interviewee lamented that *“it’s not right” for kids to have to eat lunch as early as 10:15 am or as late as 2:15pm because of overcrowding.* In addition to the safety issues associated with overcrowding, many interviewees thought it was important for more parents to understand how overutilized schools negatively impact their children’s classroom experience. A former educator debated that just two to three additional students in a classroom can make a big difference in reducing the quality of teaching and learning. This person contended that if MCPS wants to see greater academic achievement, they need smaller class sizes.

Our interviews also reflected concerns about disparities across the county in the quality of facilities. One person argued that, considering a large backlog for facilities repairs, these repairs should be prioritized over new school additions

¹ Note: as in public meetings, Phase 1 interviews focused on the three lenses of utilization, diversity, and proximity. The fourth lens, assignment stability, is an outcome of the first three, as it relates to the changes of boundaries over time and geography. For more discussion and analysis of assignment stability, see Volume I, page 77.

when open seats are available at other schools. Concerns that more renovations occur Upcounty or in affluent communities, while Downcounty schools are older, also came up during these conversations. Many other concerns about budgets and funding arose, along with comments about misperceptions when it comes to population growth. One interviewee raised concern that the blame for capacity issues is unjustly laid on development, stating that while many people think that all the growth is concentrated in high-rises, very few kids live in high-rises.

In addition to the key themes mentioned above, interviewee's comments shed light on how historical triggers for boundary changes focused primarily on disproportionate utilization, and not demographic distribution, despite diversity's inclusion in the Policy FAA since 1993. Interviewees also recommended benchmarking examples for utilization, including creative solutions for addressing overcrowding in Wake County, Miami-Dade, and Houston.

Lens #2 - Diversity

Many interviewees recognized the educational disparities that are faced by lower income students. However, the majority of interviewees were unsure that cross-county integration is the best way to resolve this. One interviewee who supported school integration sought to clarify that they did not advocate for cross-county sending patterns, but they did advocate for integrating schools that were already geographically close to each other. Other interviewees voiced concern that low-income students of color would bear the burden of traveling farther to integrate schools, with little support from inadequate and inequitable public transportation systems. One interviewee questioned the potential transportation costs of integrating schools, while another pointed out the cost of prioritizing school additions over the integration of nearby high and low capacity schools.

Interviewees were not afraid to complicate the values that undergird many integration efforts, or to doubt the academic research that validates integration. One interviewee asked if the county wants to send a message to students of color that "In order to do well, you have to travel and sit next to someone who doesn't look like you." Another interviewee stated that they did not understand the relevance of diversity because "*school is school*" and education, separate from diversity, should be the top concern. Others contended that exposure to diversity is critical to a student's success in the world, citing projections that the country will be majority minority by 2040 and kids need to know how to be around each other. Some also cited the underlying racism in arguments against diversity, saying that high achieving students of color flourish in Blair High School's student government. The range and complexity of feedback reflected the complexity of the issue and highlighted a lack of agreement on (and understanding of) the most successful solutions.

Our conversations sought greater clarity about what diversity means and how it is measured. But socioeconomic and racial disparities consistently arose as

the primary concern among interviewees. Some of our conversations indicated an awareness among interviewees that the county's issues with diversity go deeper than enrollment. *"After all these years, teachers still look at these kids in terms of their ethnicity, gender, whether those kids come from a family that was poor,"* said one interviewee when discussing the legacy of discrimination in MCPS classrooms today. Calling for more restorative justice and practices in classrooms, this person explained that *"If we do not manage [biased behavior management] at the level of teachers, by the time the kids get to the principal they are very mad because these kids know that they are being discriminated against, and they are upset about it."* These issues are also reflected among the teaching staff, according to some interview participants, who explained that the Blair magnet program, for example, did not have any diversity on their staff for a long time. But when the Blair magnet eventually hired a few Black male teachers, those teachers left shortly because *"they felt so uncomfortable,"* according to one interviewee. These concerns about representation and behavior management are also reflected in some community members' experience of inclusion, according to one interviewee. This person reported that Black families do not always feel welcome at Churchill or Whitman High School. As an example, they mentioned a friend whose Black children attended both Churchill and Wheaton High School and had widely different experiences of inclusion.

Lens #3 - Proximity to Schools

Conversations about proximity revealed the tension between community members' perception of distance or transportation costs, and their willingness to travel farther for specialized programs. Discussion topics addressed the barriers imposed by inadequate public transportation or unsafe walking conditions. But many conversations also delved into the distances that families are willing to travel to attend Richard Montgomery's IB program and Blair's Magnet Program, or the long bus rides experienced by Sherwood cluster students. Along a similar thread, an interviewee encouraged our team to better understand the *"elasticity"* of students' and parents' willingness to travel, asking *"when is too far too far?"* But as our other interviewees indicated, this elasticity will vary greatly according to geography, public transportation quality, school reputation, and socio-economic status.

According to some interviewees, high FARMS families tend to push back against the burden of traveling because they are reliant on poor public transportation and do not have equal opportunity to drive to school. Equal opportunity in transportation options also came up as a barrier to access for specialized programs. An interviewee reflected on how her grandson, upon gaining admission to a Middle School magnet program, did not qualify for bus transportation because of his address. He had the privilege of being driven to school by a guardian, but many of his neighbors were not able to take advantage of the opportunity to attend a magnet because they had no other transportation options.

Strategy 3: Small Group Meetings

Small Group Meetings Approach

Even when it is possible to convene large and diverse groups of residents in the county to participate in public meetings, there are many populations that experience barriers to participation in public meetings, but whose views, perspectives, and lived experiences are essential to gather.

Thus, the purpose of the small group meetings is to make sure that important segments of the Montgomery County population, which were underrepresented at the six public meetings, have an opportunity to participate in discussions about the boundary analysis. These segments include low income residents, students, young adults, and people associated with some racial, ethnic, cultural, or language groups.

In the first stage of the project, 12 small group meetings have been conducted, and as of the publishing of this report, an additional # are scheduled. We will continue to conduct small group meetings in the coming months to learn from and hear the concerns of various groups around the county.

In Phase 1, each small group meeting will:

- Have the same basic format and conveys the same information as the six public meetings
- Run between 60-90 minutes
- Convene small groups of 10-20 people, all from the same target population
- Incorporate the same participant handbooks and worksheets used during area-wide community meetings

Materials gathered at each meeting include:

- Detailed notes taken by 1-2 note-takers
- Participant worksheet for additional comments and questions
- Written responses to polling questions

During phase 1, we began the outreach and planning process for small group meetings. To coordinate these meetings, our team reached out to a number of active, community-based groups that were tied to those specific target populations, including local chapters of national associations, community centers, and non-profit organizations. These groups and individuals have been approached to serve as partners in the planning process, including inviting participants, providing meeting space, and offering expertise about accessibility and special

considerations for meetings with their communities.

MCPS has been an important partner in the process of identifying and reaching identified “hard to reach” populations through small group meetings. Through the Office of Student and Family Support and Engagement (OSFSE), the consultant team has been in communication with Parent Community Coordinators (PCC’s), community ambassadors who are based in Title I schools and work with MCPS families in the targeted groups listed above.

Communication with these organizations and MCPS ambassadors is in various stages of completion as of the publishing of this report. In some cases, meetings have already been conducted. In other cases, initial conversations are underway. Due to the variability of these engagement processes and the complex nature of planning with community-based groups, the resulting comments and findings from these meetings—and those in the coming months—will be included in the final report.

As of the publishing of this report meetings have been held with the following organizations:

- *Linkages to Learning (Hispanic parents)*
- *IMPACT Silver Spring (Immigrant groups & low-moderate income)*
- *AIM High (African American youth and parents)*
- *NAACP Parents Council (African American)*
- *Identity (Latino & low-moderate income, two meetings)*
- *CASA parent group (Latino & low-moderate income parents)*
- *Jack and Jill – Potomac Valley (African American parents and youth, western Montgomery County)*
- *Latino Student Achievement Action Group (LSAAG) (Hispanic parents and youth)*
- *IMPACT Silver Spring--Ethiopian Community (Amharic speaking residents)*
- *Parent Community Coordinators (MCPS) – French-speaking (French-speaking immigrant parents at Title I schools)*
- *Asian Pacific American Student Academic Achievement Action Group (Asian Pacific American students and parents)**

*Meeting scheduled for after publishing of this report.

In addition to the targeted “hard to reach” groups described above, this process also has engaged other key stakeholders using the small group meeting format to facilitate deeper engagement and increased time for questions and answers, and specific feedback. In Phase 1, these meetings included:

- *MCCPTA*
- *Educational Facilities Group*

Student Engagement

The participation and insights of MCPS students are integral to this Boundary Analysis and represent another key feature of the team’s approach to community engagement. To reach as many students as possible and to accommodate the diverse accessibility and transportation needs of students throughout a large county, the team has been working with MCPS to coordinate a strategy for student engagement. In February 2020, MCPS and the consultant team hosted a virtual student meeting intended to present initial data analysis to students and solicit their feedback through live comments and questions **Appendix 2B: Student Engagement – Comments and Questions from Virtual Meeting on page 566** to maximize participation of students from across the county.

The virtual student meeting was a first step in student engagement, and provided a foundation for the next stage of this process, in which we will continue to engage with students in a number of formats. In preparation for a more comprehensive student engagement process, we have engaged in preliminary conversations with students. These conversations have led to the development of strategies for engaging more students, as well as a foundation for understanding student experiences in relation to school utilization, diversity, and proximity.

The insights of our continued student engagement will be synthesized and shared as part of the final report.