

Aug 11, 2025

# AAC Meeting

Scheduled August 11, 2025 5:30PM to 7:30PM

## Summary

Fred Hejazi opened the second Attendance Area Committee (AAC) meeting, explaining that the primary focus would be to address questions including those regarding why it cannot be postponed and why portable classrooms are not a long-term solution. David Lerner, Executive Director of Elementary Schools for Howard County Public School System, discussed how school overcrowding impacts classroom spaces, student movement, and facility use, while Daniel Lubeley explained the challenges with portable classrooms, noting their lower lifespan and higher maintenance needs. Mr. Thronson raised concerns about the impact of overcrowding on special education and remedial services and the potential loss of Title I funding for Swansfield Elementary. Ms. Ahn and Ms. Patel along with other committee members, discussed the importance of maintaining contiguous communities, avoiding the creation of "islands" for walkers, and ensuring "strong feeds" between schools. Mr. Hejazi confirmed he would consolidate feedback from committee members via personalized online forms to prepare for the next meeting, if needed. Meeting ended at 7:12PM.

## Details

- **Meeting Introduction and Purpose** Mr. Hejazi initiated the meeting, noting the presence of new attendees who missed the prior week's session. Mr. Hejazi explained the decision to skip a re-presentation of a pre-shared video and stated the meeting's primary focus would be to address common questions regarding redistricting, particularly why it cannot be postponed and why portables are not a long-term solution.
- **Impact of Overcrowding on Schools** Mr. Lerner, Executive Director of Elementary Schools for Howard County Public School System, discussed the effects of school overcrowding. He clarified that overcrowding does not correlate with larger class sizes due to independent class size ratios. However, he noted impacts on classroom spaces, as areas designed for other purposes are converted into classrooms, leading to fewer spaces for small group interventions or teacher meetings.
- **Overcrowding Effects on Student Environment and Facilities** Mr. Lerner detailed how overcrowding affects student movement and facility use. Hallways become congested, extending transition times and reducing instructional periods. Cafeterias become more crowded, resulting in longer lunch lines, and playgrounds also become overcrowded during breaks. Community events also suffer from limited parking and insufficient space to accommodate attendees.

- **Issues with Portable Classrooms** Mr. Larner explained that portable classrooms, while functional, are not ideal learning environments and are intended to be temporary solutions. He highlighted that portables exacerbate existing overcrowding issues in shared school spaces like gyms and cafeterias. Additionally, students in portables often lose instructional time due to transitions to and from the main building, and many portables lack restrooms.
- **Lifespan and Maintenance of Portables** Mr. Lubeley elaborated on the challenges with portables, noting their lower lifespan and higher maintenance needs compared to permanent brick-and-mortar buildings. He emphasized that portables are truly meant to be temporary and are not designed with the same systems as standard buildings, which may impact daily operations and education quality.
- **Overcrowding Impact on Special Education and Remedial Services** Mr. Thronson inquired about the impact of overcrowding on special education and remedial services. Mr. Larner stated that while Individualized Educational Program (IEP)s are legal documents that must be followed, overcrowding can force special education services into non-ideal spaces, like offices or hallways, leading to increased distractions for students who require focused support.
- **Centennial Lane Redistricting Challenges** Mr. Hejazi addressed concerns about redistricting for Centennial Lane ES, specifically why it cannot be left alone or why redistricting cannot solely occur to the north. He explained that geographical constraints, including the alignment of high school boundaries and the small population densities in northern walk zones, necessitate moving students, potentially turning walkers into bused students, regardless of the direction of the change.
- **AAC Role in Redistricting Recommendations** Ms. Ahn sought clarity on the committee's role in recommending plans to the Superintendent. Mr. Lubeley clarified that the AAC is not required to select one of the three proposed scenarios but should provide feedback and recommendations based on Board policy. He emphasized that the AAC can suggest developing new plans if the current ones do not meet their deemed necessities.
- **Addressing the Underlying Overutilization Issue** Mr. Hejazi reiterated that the fundamental goal of the redistricting process is to alleviate the utilization issue that initiated it, not to avoid redistricting altogether. Mr. Lubeley further clarified that while the Superintendent and Board must address capacity, the AAC's role is to provide feedback on proposed plans, not to create a new solution.
- **Community Feedback and Scenario Review** Ms. Cogdell inquired whether feedback to the Superintendent needed to be a consensus or separate lines of feedback. Mr. Hejazi confirmed they would work towards collecting feedback to create a consensus. Mr. Lubeley confirmed that all community and AAC feedback would be presented to the Superintendent, especially if the feedback indicates the current plans are not working due to issues like moving walkers or creating small feeds.

- **Consideration of Staggered Redistricting and Exemptions** Ms. Seriki suggested a staggered redistricting approach or exemptions for certain students, such as fifth graders or siblings, to minimize disruption. Mr. Hejazi acknowledged that such administrative approaches would be difficult to manage but noted that the board might consider them, as exceptions have been granted in the past. Mr. Lubeley clarified that these would likely be considered exemptions rather than part of the core redistricting plan.
- **Title I Funding and Redistricting Impact** Mr. Thronson raised concerns about Swansfield Elementary losing its Title I funding despite a high Free And Reduced Meals (FARMS) participation rate and how redistricting might impact the need for Title I supports. Mr. Larner explained that Title I funding is received based on countywide need and allocated annually based on the neediest schools, and Swansfield's loss was due to other schools having greater economic disadvantage, not a systemic reduction in Title I funding. He also stated that redistricting could potentially lead to Swansfield regaining Title I status if it significantly increased its percentage of economically disadvantaged students.
- **Bryant Woods Redistricting Rationale** Ms. Pantano questioned the selection of polygons for movement in scenarios one and two, specifically concerning Bryant Woods ES and the creation of non-contiguous neighborhoods.
- **Leveraging Northern Schools for Centennial Lane ES Overcrowding** Ms. Patel asked if Hollifield Station ES and Waverly ES's capacity could be leveraged to relieve overcrowding at Centennial Lane ES. Mr. Hejazi explained that the northern polygons are small, and larger populations would lead to the same issues with the walk zones. He added that the current scope of redistricting was based on prior analysis showing insufficient capacity in those northern schools to address Centennial Lane ES's needs effectively.
- **Maintaining Contiguous Neighborhoods** Ms. Pantano initiated a discussion about maintaining contiguous neighborhoods, especially concerning polygon 132 and its relation to Bryant Woods ES and Clemens Crossing ES. Ms. Pantano expressed concern that polygon 132, despite being geographically close to Clemens Crossing ES and having been part of that community for 35 years, was moved to Bryant Woods ES, disrupting contiguity. Mr. Hejazi confirmed that maintaining contiguous neighborhoods is a policy consideration.
- **Polygon Reassignments and Community Impact** Ms. Pantano questioned the decision-making process for polygon reassignments, specifically why polygon 132 was not moved to Clemens Crossing and why polygon 3133 was moved to Swansfield from Bryant Woods ES, despite being closer to Bryant Woods ES. Ms. Pantano highlighted that polygon 132, particularly the Sebring area, becomes isolated due to a large highway, making it an "island" disconnected from its community and impacting community development. Ms. Pantano noted that the community in polygon 132 was impacted by redistricting in 2020 and that this current proposal would further increase that impact.

- **Focusing on Overarching Ideas for Recommendations** Ms. Bubenko advised against focusing on specific polygon reassignments and instead recommended boiling concerns down to overarching ideas for recommendations to the Superintendent. Ms. Bubenko suggested formulating ideas such as not reassigning students who were recently moved in the last redistricting, avoiding the creation of non-contiguous areas, or how to redefine or consider contiguous neighborhoods. Hejazi agreed with Ms. Bubenko, suggesting that specific examples like the three polygons forming one community could be used to illustrate high-level comments without getting into granular reassignments.
- **Consensus Gathering Process** Mr. Hejazi introduced a new method for gathering committee consensus, which involves members submitting their general comments, feedback on online maps, and concerns through a personalized online form. Members can also provide feedback on specific scenarios (1, 2, or 3) for elementary, middle, and high schools, with the option to update their responses later. Mr. Hejazi plans to consolidate all opinions into a single document to be shared with the committee as a summary of their work, in addition to meeting notes and answered questions.
- **Initial Committee Recommendations** Mr. Lubeley asked if there were initial recommendations that could quickly achieve committee consensus, such as not moving "walkers" (students who walk to school). Ms. Ahn strongly agreed, emphasizing the importance of maintaining contiguous communities and avoiding the creation of "islands," particularly for walkers, and considering polygons with no students. Ms. Patel also suggested maintaining "strong feeds" as a recommendation.
- **Understanding Plan Creation and Policy** Ms. Pantano expressed frustration that she couldn't get answers to specific questions about why certain polygons were moved, especially since scenarios one and two were identical for her area, suggesting confidence in those moves. Mr. Lubeley explained that the creators of the plans, Mr. Rogers and Mr. Omerso, were not present to provide detailed explanations for individual polygon movements. Mr. Lubeley clarified that the plans are developed based on Policy 6010, particularly section 3B criteria, and are presented as templates to solicit community feedback rather than final decisions. Ms. Bubenko noted that the recurrence of a reassignment in more than one plan did not imply any favor for that change and that the scenarios were meant to draw comment from the community. Mr. Hejazi added that the scenarios are meant to show different ways of solving the redistricting problem and balancing factors like student numbers and utilization goals.
- **Calculation of Feeds** Ms. Patel asked for a mathematical explanation of how "strong feeds" are calculated given that Policy 6010 encourages them. Mr. Hejazi and Ms. Bubenko explained that feeds are calculated by overlaying school boundaries and counting how many students within a higher level's (e.g., middle school) boundary would have come from a lower level school (e.g. elementary school), then dividing by the total upper level school's population to get a percentage. Ms. Bubenko added that the policy goal is for no less than 15% of a receiving school's population to come from a feeder elementary school.

- **Scheduling the Next Meeting for Consensus** Mr. Lubeley suggested that another meeting would be necessary to bring consolidated ideas from the survey back to the committee for public consensus. Mr. Hejazi explained that consolidating all feedback by the immediate Thursday might be challenging, proposing a verbal collection of information if the meeting were to be held that soon. Several committee members in the chat agreed on the need for another meeting. Mr. Lerner suggested having a third meeting later, perhaps next week, to allow Mr. Hejazi sufficient time to consolidate the information. Ms. Ahn also supported the idea of a consolidated report for a third meeting.
- **Logistics for Next Meeting and Form Submission** Mr. Hejazi noted the deadline for providing recommendations to the Superintendent is the following Thursday, meaning any subsequent meeting would need to be before next Tuesday. Mr. Hejazi proposed working on Wednesday to consolidate forms submitted by tomorrow evening to still hold the Thursday meeting this week. He also confirmed that he would manually send out personalized forms to each committee member and would prioritize sending Ms. Cogdell's form due to her travel plans.
- **Individuals in attendance:** Mr. Hejazi (Citygate GIS), Mr. Lubeley (HCPSS), Ms. Bubenko (HCPSS), Mr. Lerner (HCPSS), Ms. Seriki, Mr. Thronson, Ms. Pantano, Ms. Stevens-Morrison, Ms. Lohin, Ms. Ahn, Ms. Patel, Mr. Cogdell, and Ms. Emman. Additionally, there were several members of the public that attended for parts of the meeting.

#### **Next steps**

Mr. Hejazi will send out the survey forms to the group tonight, starting with Ms. Cogdell, and then consolidate the feedback into a document on Wednesday.