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# Community discussions question de facto segregation

## Concerns raised over school economic disparities and overpopulation

from REDISTRICTING page A1

while only 33.2 percent of Whitman is non-white.

According to Rockville area parent Marissa Valero, housing prices throughout the county are largely driven by school zoning differences.

“Around Rockville, the difference between being zoned for Richard Montgomery and being zoned for Rockville is up to 200,000 dollars in cost,” she said.

Residents of District 1, including Bethesda and Chevy Chase, exceed county averages for income, employment, educational attainment, mobility, and housing price regardless of racial or ethnic group. Residents of District 5, including Silver Spring and Takoma Park, are often below the county averages and are less likely to have graduated high school, have enrolled in college, hold a well-paying job, or own a home.

Valero said she believes that a vastly different socioeconomic makeup among school populations translates to differences in school resources. She saw differences in school equity when her son, a student at Twinbrook Elementary, played a baseball game at another elementary school and noticed the superior quality of their playground equipment.

“Why is not every school a school that we should be proud of? Why are these schools, why are the inequities so great if we are in the so-called richest county in the world?” Valero said. “What are we prioritizing, and what are we telling the kids?”

### Diversifying school populations

At community meetings, attendees divided into small discussion groups, focusing on three questions: What issues are important to you to include in the boundaries analysis? What are your greatest concerns about current attendance zones? What do you want to learn from the boundary analysis? One member of each small group took notes on the discussion at their table on poster paper; at the end of group discussions, posters were displayed at the back of the room for a gallery walk.

Many community members cited increased diversity among schools as a key consideration in redrawing boundary lines.

Rockville junior Iqra Mohamed, who attended the Earle B. Wood meeting, hopes that redrawing boundary lines will allow increased opportunities for students of color.

“I don’t think that in 2019 de facto segregation should be a normal thing,” Mohamed said. “I don’t think that people of color should be not allowed to have the same opportunities and have overcrowded schools and not have proper sports gear because of their zip code.”

Junior and Blair Secretary for MoCo Students For Change Adiba Chowdhury said she has personally felt discouraged by overtly homogeneous classrooms.

“So often I’m in a class where I’m the only Muslim girl, or the only Bengali girl, or really the only person of color, and that’s really disappointing,” Chowdhury said. “And that’s not just classes: that’s in clubs, that’s in events, that’s where I go and what I do.”

MoCo Students For Change Co-President and Springbrook junior Michael Solomon also believes that classroom diversity can be equally beneficial to white students as it is to students of color.

“It is a detriment to minority students and [students] in poverty as much as it is to your students from advantaged backgrounds,” Solomon said. “Kids at... Whitman are going to school with people who look exactly like them, and they’re not... learning how to... collaborate with people who come from different backgrounds than they do,” Solomon said. An upbringing with a lack of



AMANDA LIU

**BREAKOUT GROUPS** Parents and student activists engage in discourse at the Earle B. Wood community meeting.

diversity could, Mohamed believes, have lasting negative consequences.

“If you’re surrounded by one race your entire life, if one race is introduced to you out of nowhere, it’s going to create resentment and it’s going to cause that inner prejudice, and that inner racism is going to come out,” Mohamed said.

This year, a number of incidents involving racial epithets and racist behaviors have occurred at Montgomery County schools. Most recently, two Whitman students are under police investigation for a hate-bias incident after posting a picture in blackface to social media and captioning it with the N-word.

“Why is not every school a school that we should be proud of?... What are we doing, what are we prioritizing, and what are we telling the kids?”

—Marissa Valero, Parent

### Broad-scale community impact

Many community members expressed hesitation about redrawing district lines. Parents argued that redistricting will not solve inherent self-segregation within schools.

“We can solve the problem of integrating schools, but even within schools there is still the problem of segregation,” one parent mentioned at the Earle B. Wood meeting.

During a small group discussion, one parent mentioned inconvenient transportation as a potential drawback to redrawn school boundaries.

“I’m worried about the boundaries being far... you think it would be better if students went far for the fact of diversity? I’m saying proximity should be a top priority, and diversity number two,” he said in response to Mohamed’s advocacy for diversity.

An Einstein cluster parent at the Walter Johnson meeting reflected on some concerns brought up by parents.

“I think the concerns that people are having that kids are being bused from one part of the county down to the other... out of all the hypotheticals is the most ridiculous...that’s more fear-mongering than anything else,” he said. “Anything with real estate is probably the biggest thing that people are worried about.”

### Acknowledging all perspectives

The topic of discussion invited outspoken arguments from all ends of the spectrum. Some felt intolerance from those with opposing viewpoints.

“The boundaries bring out the

### Elevating the student voice

The resolution to hire an external consultant to conduct a boundary study was proposed by a student: 2018-2019 Student Member of the Board (SMOB) and Richard Montgomery senior Ananya Tadikonda. Yet, in the implementation of the resolution, student activists noted a lack of county initiative to encourage student participation.

Joel Lev-Tov, member of MoCo Students For Change and a junior at Springbrook, expressed that he did not believe the county truly valued the student voice.

“There’s just been a very bad outreach on the part of MCPS to parents and students... I only learned about this through MoCo For Change; I did not learn about this through MCPS, so I think there’s a major problem there,” he said.

Clarksburg junior and former Student Member of the Board nominee Zoe Tishaev shared similar concerns upon noticing that the guiding questions for the town hall meeting only directly addressed Montgomery County parents.

“We the students have to be leading this discussion, and when they... don’t include students in that, that breaks my heart,” she said. “I think that’s indicative that the Board of Education still does not see us as equals in the conversation.”

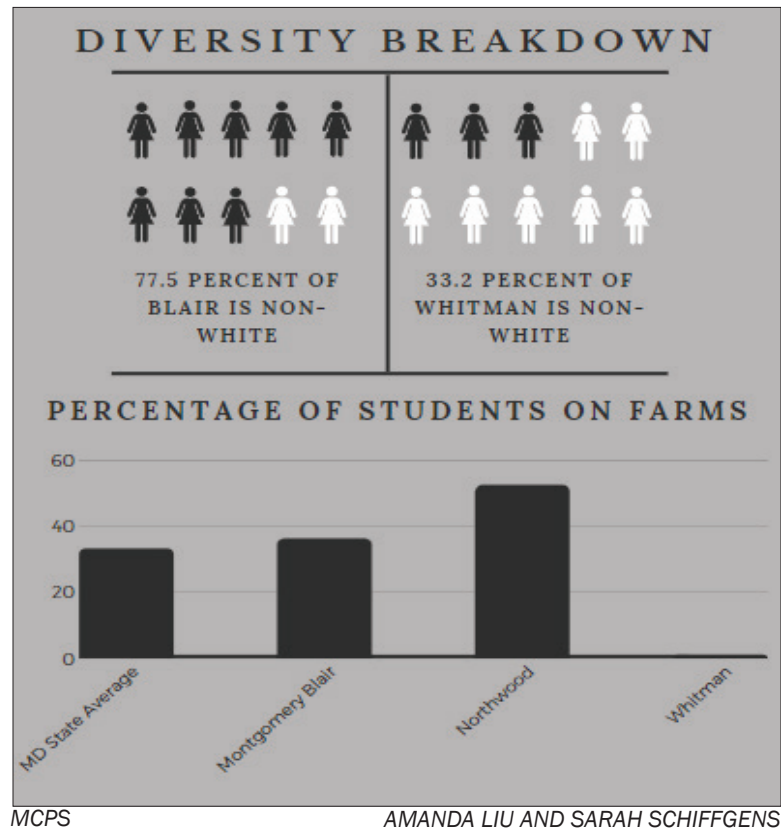
Valero mentioned that the timing of meetings may have hindered student attendance, as many students have homework and extracurricular commitments. Even students who did attend the meeting, like Mohamed, felt that their voices were not always respected by the adults in attendance.

“I feel like he was hearing but he wasn’t listening to us when we were trying to explain that... the divide between the wealth in the schools... is causing detrimental problems,” Mohamed said of one of the adult members of her small group.

MCPS shared community newsletters about boundary analysis initiatives through email blasts to parents and posted town hall information to Facebook and Twitter pages. Principals have also received direct memos about community meetings to share with parents and post to the school website at their discretion.

Lev-Tov highlighted ways he thinks that the county could place a greater emphasis on the student voice.

“I just think that MCPS has to do a much better job of getting the input from students, like maybe holding town halls inside of schools, during the school days at lunch or something, because... it affects the students much more than it does the parents,” he said.



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MCPS

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