

TESTIMONY OF THE SLIGO CREEK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PTA
BEFORE THE BOARD OF EDUCATION ON BOUNDARY CHANGES

November 11, 2009

Members of the Board, Dr. Weast, good evening. My name is Jennifer Lage, and I am the President of the Sligo Creek Elementary School PTA. The parents of our school community have been actively involved in the boundary process, and we are pleased that Dr. Weast's recommendation recognizes our concerns about the impact of possible under-enrollment at our school. Looking at the actual enrollment data at our school for this year, our community remains concerned that Sligo Creek's Academy program would have only one class per grade in one or more grade levels next year and probably in future years under Dr. Weast's proposal.

Data from our school administration shows that there are 180 students enrolled this year in Sligo Creek's Academy program, excluding students from SC4 and SC5 in Takoma Park. However, MCPS projects 201 students from this same area by 2012 – this would be a 12% increase over current enrollment. While it is true that our school has experienced an increase in enrollment this year, almost all of this increase comes from SC4 and SC5, in Takoma Park. We are therefore concerned that the projected enrollment increase in our school is based on enrollment trends in zones outside of our new boundaries. We have also noted that the changes in projected enrollment since last spring have been very uneven across

the elementary schools. For example, for the 2011 school year, enrollment projections for Sligo Creek have increased by 18% since last spring, compared with a projected increase of only 3% at East Silver Spring and a projected decrease in enrollment at the other elementary schools in the study. Given the lack of any housing construction within our current boundaries and excluding SC4 and SC5, we do not understand why Sligo Creek is projected to bear almost all of the enrollment increases out of all affected schools. We raise these questions not to debate the enrollment numbers but rather to encourage the Board to consider the potential consequences of normal and foreseeable deviations from enrollment projections, which can change dramatically each year.

With the potential under-enrollment in the Academy program, parents and staff are concerned that our children's needs and abilities may not be met with only one class in a grade. In addition, our ability to meet the needs of our French Immersion and high-functioning autism students will be in jeopardy if there is only one teacher in a grade in the Academy program. One of the purposes of this boundary change is to improve education by relieving over-utilization, yet we believe that the proposed solution would make education even more challenging for our teachers and kids when considering differentiation of curricula for all students at Sligo Creek.

For these reasons, we appreciate the Board's decision to request an alternative that would reassign a small section of downtown Silver Spring, known as ESS5b, from East Silver Spring to Sligo Creek. This alternative would increase the educational welfare of all students at Sligo Creek by avoiding the types of academic and programmatic issues that come with under-enrollment. ESS5b currently has around 25 students attending elementary school. This is enough to make a real difference at our school, without causing over-utilization of the Sligo Creek facility. We are aware that there is some concern about ensuring a full utilization of the capital investment in the East Silver Spring facility, and we recognize that this is a very important consideration. We note that the ESS5a zone of downtown Silver Spring is experiencing a surge of housing development. Based on this, MCPS can expect utilization within the efficient range at the East Silver Spring facility within a few years. Finally, we emphasize that the Board's requested alternative would have no adverse effect on the educational welfare of any student and would cause no programmatic impacts at any other school.

In closing, we ask that you select a new boundary option that provides sufficient enrollment at Sligo Creek to maintain two classes per grade. The Board's requested alternative proposal will ultimately achieve this result while serving the goal of ensuring a quality education for all children at all affected schools. We urge the Board to address our concerns now through this boundary

change, rather than waiting to solve foreseeable programmatic problems from under-enrollment at a later date. Thank you very much for your consideration.