

June 27, 2024

Howard County Council
3430 Courthouse Drive
Ellicott City, MD 21043

RE: CR 76-2024 School Capacity Charts

I watched the worksession with the BOE and staff and offer my thoughts for your consideration as you continue to deal with the APF charts, both this year and in the future, especially given a new APF advisory group has been formed.

I am providing these comments on behalf of myself as a resident of the County. It has now been over 20 years since I was on the inside and had all of the information that is available to you. However, most of the facts that were true then continue to be true today.

In general, while the term “overcrowded” is often used as part of the dialogue to send the message of failure and create fear for parents, it has nothing to do with the measure of capacity to enrollment. This is a BOE calculation projecting enrollment based on specific criteria that it is clear most do not understand.

Much of the worksession focused on Bryant Woods Elementary so I will also use that example.

BRYANT WOODS

In 2016 the chart projected a capacity of 361 (for 2018-2021). Projected enrollment was 371 to 381 so overcapacity of 1 to 5 %.

In 2022 and 2023 the chart continued to show the capacity as 361 for 2025-2027 and 2026-2028.

By 2023 enrollment was projected to be down to 361 in 2026-27 and grow to 387 by 2027-28

In 2024, the chart you are considering now it shows the capacity as **289** for 2027-2030. This is a reduction in capacity of 72 students and that is what is causing the utilization to jump to 131%. It has nothing to do with the redevelopment of Legacy at Twin Rivers.

With this information, look at the projected enrollment.

In 2023 the enrollment was projected to be 387 in 2027-28.

In 2024 the enrollment is projected to be **6 fewer** students in 2027-28 with 381.

BOE policy that has been consistent since the early 1990’s. There is a minimum square footage for a classroom to be counted as capacity (you were told the current size is 660 square feet). Relocatable classrooms have never been counted in capacity.

For many reasons, particularly in older communities, the appropriate program changes have had a major impact on capacity. Here are a few examples that have long impacted the calculation: All-day kindergarten – a room could accommodate 22 students in the morning and another 22 in the afternoon so when all day was implemented if a school had 2 room for kindergarten the

capacity was 88 students. All day kindergarten reduced the capacity by 44 students. More recent program changes like ESOL, G&T, special needs and other programs were accommodated by taking a classroom (660 sq ft) and dividing it in half where 11 students received special attention in each half. But, the rooms no longer counted as capacity since they no longer met the standard. Same number of students are in the space, but not part of capacity. Appropriately, relocatable modular classroom are not counted as they were intended to be a temporary measure until enrolment dropped or redistricting or a new school was constructed.

I think you will find that most classrooms are around the target, but for example if a school has a target capacity of 22 students per classroom and there are 2 third grade classrooms with a target capacity 44 students and enrollment is 48 students the 2 rooms are about 10% over capacity. Can a classroom accommodate 4 additional students or do you add a third class and have an average class size of 16 students?

A suggestion was made that a redistricting was needed for Bryant Woods in the next month to avoid the 131.8 % over capacity with 381 students in 2024. The chart is clear that 381 is a projection for 2027-28 school year so there is 3 years to address the issue, not 1 month.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph Rutter".

Joseph Rutter, AICP
3435 Jennings Chapel Road
Woodbine, MD 21797

cc: County Executive Calvin Ball
DPZ Director Lynda Eisenberg