

Why High School 13 Should be Built in Jessup

By: Rick Kohn

A fitting analogy to the question of where to build the next high school is found in the game of soccer. A player learns to pass the ball to where his teammate is going; not to where she is when the ball is passed.

When planning where to build the next high school, we need to consider where we will be in five years and beyond. We should build it where it will positively impact growth into the future.

The following factors should influence the decision to locate the next high school in Jessup.



1. Our county is overcrowded both in the northeast and the southeast;
2. Our schools are segregated with low-income schools concentrated in the southeast, and school and neighborhood integration must be a priority; and
3. It is time we finally pay attention to the southeast and its needs.

Overcrowding

Howard County high schools today are overcrowded, and headed toward more overcrowding. Of the twelve high schools in Howard County, eight will be over-enrolled within five years without redistricting. Obviously, the next high school will need to address this fact. However, there are some focusing only on overcrowded schools in the northeast part of the county even though the next school will need to address county-wide overcrowding.

Current school enrollments are a reflection in part due to how district lines are drawn, not necessarily where the most people live. Many parents state that they cannot be redistricted to a school that is farther away than their current school. However, many students do not attend the closest school currently. Many may not realize how impossible it would be for the current schools to balance capacity without major redistricting. Table 1 shows the statistics for Howard County schools if each student were to attend the closest high school. One can see that schools are not located closest to the populations they serve.



Clearly, satisfying a "closest school" criterion is not realistic. Looking at the data in Table 1, six schools would be overcrowded if everyone attended the closest school. That leaves 6 schools under-enrolled, each of them in the northwest or central part of the county, with no under-enrolled schools in the south.

Table 1. Projected districts if each student attends the closest school in 2022, % of capacity, % FARM, average driving time to school, and average distance to school.

High School	% Capacity	% FARM	Avg Time	Avg Dist
Atholton HS	76%	20%	7.2	2.5
Centennial HS	120%	7%	8.5	3.9
Glenelg HS	69%	4%	8.9	5.1
Hammond HS	122%	37%	7.3	3.8
Howard HS	131%	13%	7.0	3.7
Long Reach HS	175%	35%	8.0	3.7
Marriotts Ridge HS	48%	5%	8.7	4.4
Mt Hebron HS	177%	15%	6.6	3.5
Oakland Mills HS	42%	53%	5.0	1.5
Reservoir HS	147%	24%	8.3	4.1
River Hill HS	73%	6%	8.0	3.5
Wilde Lake HS	81%	50%	6.1	1.9
Average by student	105%	23%	7.4	3.2
Average by school	105%	22%	7.5	3.5
SD by school	46.5%	17.5%	1.2	1.0

Results calculated from data released by HCPSS via MPIA request 2018-004 for 2022 projections.

Indeed, Howard HS is overcrowded with current districts, but it borders a district that is under enrolled - Oakland Mills. Parents from Howard have objected to being redistricted to Oakland Mills for various reasons. Had their requests not been granted, it would have alleviated some of the overcrowding that is seen today.

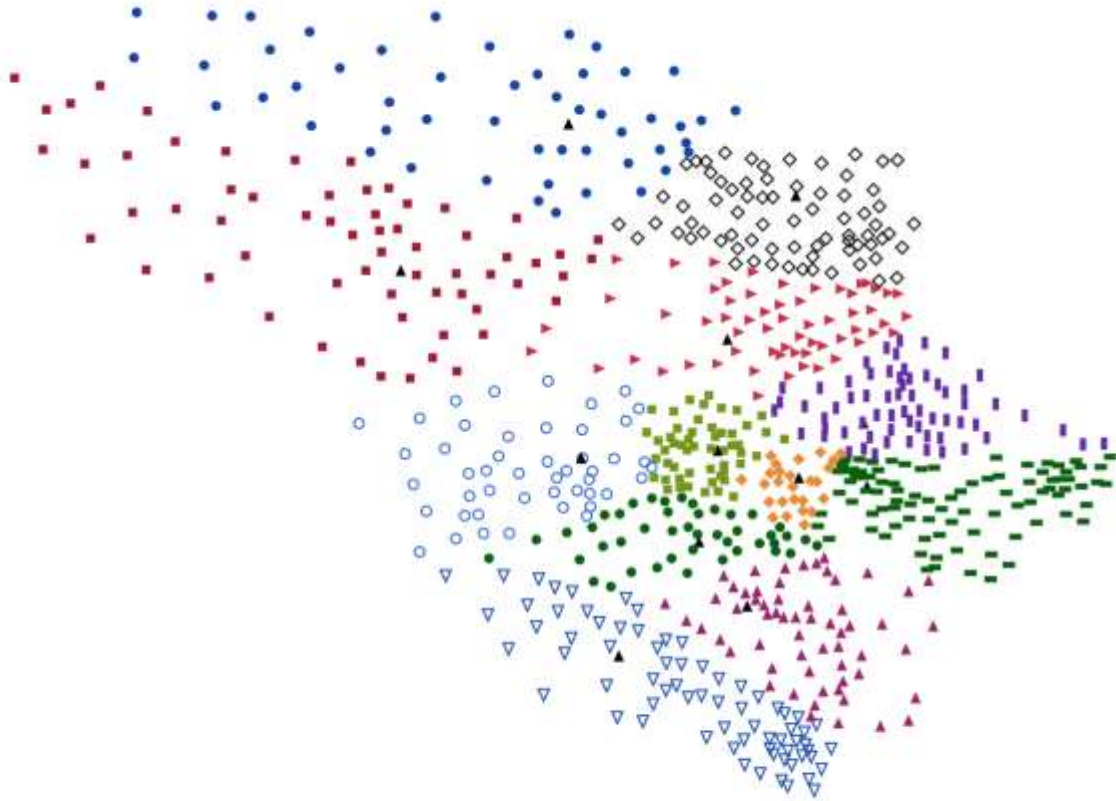


Figure 1. Howard County high school districts if each polygon is sent to the closest school. Different symbols represent different districts. Solid black triangles represent high schools.

Many have opposed any attempt to redistrict students in order to shift students in overcrowded schools toward under-enrolled schools. There is a notion by some that building another school is going to be a replacement for redistricting, thinking that only students going to the new school are going to need to change schools.

The fact is there will be eight overcrowded schools that will need relief. We cannot send all of the "extra" students in each school to one new school building. Students should be shifted from one district to the next. There will still need to be widespread redistricting irrespective of where the next school is built.



In the discussion of Elkridge and Jessup, whichever location receives the new school, students will be shifted toward that school.

If it is Elkridge, students in the north will be shifted directly east, and students in the south will be shifted north.

If it is Jessup, students in the north will be shifted southeast, and students in the south will be shifted east.

The school district boundaries will be moved in the opposite direction. There have been arguments that the new school must be in Elkridge because it makes no sense for someone in an overcrowded school like Howard or Centennial to have to travel all the way to Jessup. Correct, it doesn't make sense. The redistricting would need to shift students to neighboring schools until the gaps are filled.

Computer optimizations of school enrollments show that it is possible to balance capacity irrespective of whether the next school is built in Jessup or Elkridge. The demographics can be balanced to the extent desired for either location, and both potential schools will decrease the time it takes for the average person to drive to the assigned school.



Currently, the average Howard County student lives about 8 minutes and 3.5 miles from the assigned school. With an additional school this time may be reduced to about 7.5 minutes and 3.1 miles for either location. Preferably, for the same time expended to arrive at school now, the schools can be integrated without increasing the commute time.

Which location would best integrate the county?

Another characteristic of Howard County is that despite being one of the wealthiest counties in the state, it is also becoming increasingly segregated (Figure 2). Previous residential growth and school redistricting decisions have created low-income pockets and schools that are segregated by race and income. To be precise, Howard County's "low-income" school districts are about average income compared to the rest of the state, but they are nonetheless segregated from the high-income districts in the county. This campaign has addressed the many disadvantages of this segregation before, and it adversely affects the education of our students throughout the county not to mention the social fabric.

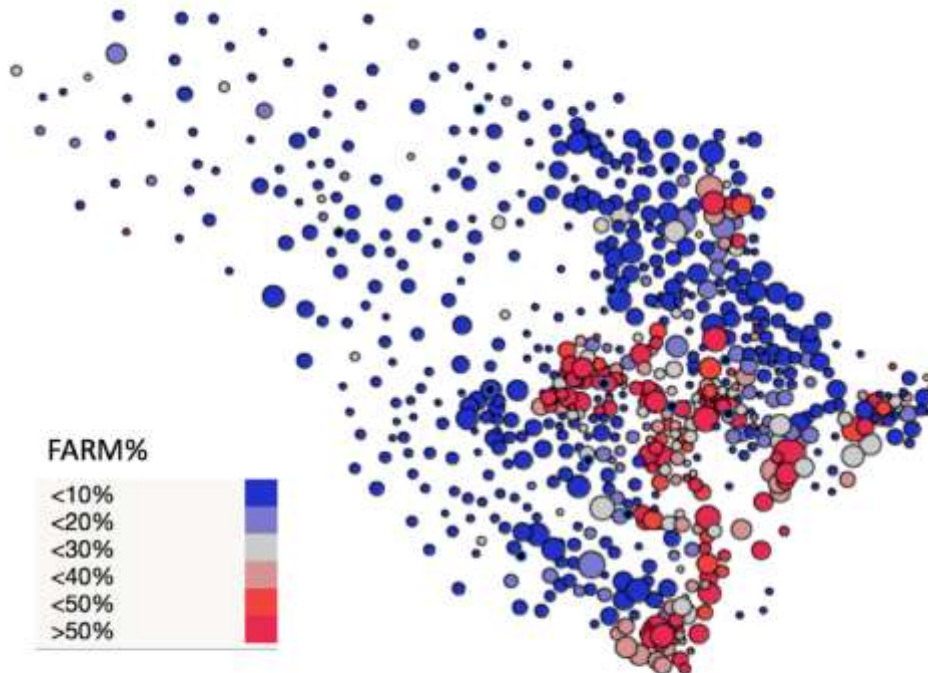


Figure 2. Economic demographic distribution by polygon in Howard County. Larger circles represent more students.

A new school in Elkridge will move students in the wealthy northern districts to the east. For example, Centennial students will be moved to Howard. At the same time, students in the lower-income districts will be moved east and north. For example, northern Hammond students will be moved to Long Reach. Whichever way the students go, toward the vacant school, the district lines will be moved in the opposite direction. In the case of Hammond, the district will be almost entirely south of the actual school building. Building the school in Elkridge will make it possible to keep the wealthy north and the lower-income south separate. It will increase the FARM percentage in Oakland Mills and Wild Lake, which already have the highest FARM percentage.

A new school in Jessup will shift students toward the southeast. For example, Howard students would be moved southward to Long Reach. The district lines for Oakland Mills and Hammond would move northward. The intermingling of the north and the south could create more integrated school districts, which should be a goal for the county.



But some would say it is the opposite of the goal. Less segregated school districts could be created if

the new school were located in either location, but it is less likely integrated districts would be created if the new school is in Elkridge. It is not clear that all parties even recognize that building a school in either location is not going to alleviate the need for redistricting.

Building the next high school in Jessup instead of Elkridge could increase racial and economic integration.

Where is the room for growth?

The final reason to consider building the school in Jessup is because of the revitalization that would accompany the new school.

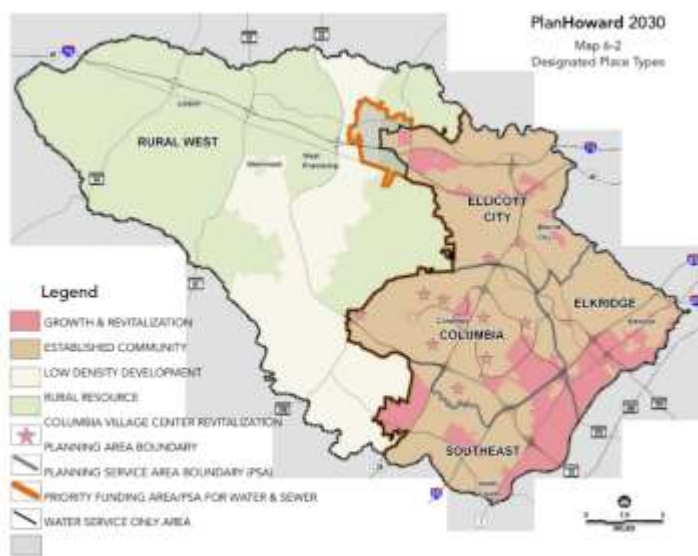


Figure 3. Plan for growth and revitalization.

For a very long time, this area of the county has been ignored as growth and revitalization projects shelved to pay attention to other parts of the county. This cannot continue any longer.

Figure 3 shows a map of planned growth in Howard County. The area around Elkridge is considered an established community, but the area in Jessup is slated for growth and revitalization.

Residential projects such as the Laurel Park Station have already gone through the approval process and there are likely more in the pipeline. As an area identified for growth and revitalization, there is no better way to start than by building a state-of-the-art school that serves the county.

Looking at the area for growth and economic revitalization, integrated schools, and better distribution of diversity throughout the eastern part of the county, Jessup would be a good choice for the new school. It is a move in the right direction.