



Howard County Public School System Board of Education
Policy 6010 Testimony
December 16, 2021

On behalf of the Association of Community Services (ACS) and our over 150 member organizations and community advocates, I support keeping all tools available to us when making decisions around redistricting. We truly value the Howard County School System (HCPSS) as an ACS member and are proud of the strong partnership that this membership affords to the nonprofit community. Toward this end, ACS is dedicated to working together so Howard County a place of opportunity for residents of all ages.

The Howard County community believes in the power of education and places value in diversity, community engagement, and striving for equity. As we approach another time of redistricting in the HCPSS, we remember how divisive the process became and recognize that difficult decisions are ahead of us. At the same time, we believe that we can learn from the past and work together to ensure that the process and outcomes work for *all* of our children.

That being said, we appreciate the proposed revisions to Policy 6010 and want to address a couple of areas of concern, particularly on Page 3 of 11 of the policy, Section III. B. 3. Demographic Characteristics of Student Population. First and foremost, we applaud the specific focus on Policy 1080 Educational Equity in III. B. 3. a., a HCPSS policy that ACS supports. We have heard that there is a movement to eliminate the potential for socioeconomic status (SES) to be used in redistricting decisions as noted in III. B. 3. b. **ACS strongly urges you maintain the current wording of the November 2, 2021 draft of the policy to allow the use of SES to be included in decision-making** because an essential part of an equitable redistricting plan is utilizing data available to make decisions and track the impact. The language does not *require* SES to be used, however, it does *allow* for it to be used. Removing a tool from our toolbox does not help us move towards equity.

Additionally, if/when SES is utilized as a factor in redistricting, it is imperative that HCPSS is particularly attentive to what is written in Section III. B. 3. “school attendance areas should promote the creation of a diverse and inclusive student body *at both the sending and receiving schools*” (emphasis added). It does not uphold our values of equity and inclusiveness if we, for example, solely redistrict students in a lower SES to schools full of students with a high SES. In order to be fair, students of *every* SES will need to be open to redistricting, and schools and communities will need to build in supports for everyone who moves to be welcomed, respected, and fully included into their new schools.

The second area of concern is Section III. B. 3. c., which states “Academic performance of students in both the sending and receiving schools as measured by current standardized testing results.” Standardized testing results are not the sole nor most accurate measure of academic performance, and standardized tests are often problematic because they tend to be based on the norms and values of people who are White and middle to upper SES. While students can learn to excel in the tests, the more equitable focus is to recognize multiple ways of measuring academic performance and knowledge



acquisition. **Therefore, we recommend that the language be amended to say, “Academic performance of students in both the sending and receiving schools, which may be measured by a combination of current standardized testing results, reading levels, grades, and/or other relevant measures.”**

I want to, again, recognize that making redistricting decisions is difficult. Change is hard, particularly with the high stress of the pandemic for almost two years. There will be loss when students need to change schools, and there are opportunities for greater belonging when students move to new schools. If we make decisions by truly focusing on equity and building the supports for students and their families to manage the changes to come, then we will truly build an even stronger Howard County community.

The measure of our success is not how well we do the easy stuff, but how we respond to the challenges. ACS will continue to work with you so that *every* child has the opportunities and resources to thrive in a community where they feel they belong. We look forward to continuing our strong partnership with you toward that goal.

Respectfully,

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Executive Director
Association of Community Services of Howard County