

To the Esteemed Members of the Montgomery County Board of Education,

I would like to take this opportunity to add my comments to the record regarding the proposed Capital Improvements Plan (CIP), in particular the proposals for relocating the Blair G. Ewing Center from its current location on Avery Road in Rockville, to the site of the former English Manor Elementary School (currently housing the School for Tomorrow), located on Bestor Drive in Aspen Hill.

As a parent and a resident of Aspen Hill who lives near the English Manor school, and also as the vice president of the Aspen Hill Civic Association (AHCA), I am deeply concerned about this proposed relocation. Many members of the Board of Directors of the AHCA, as well as members of the community that I have spoken with, share my concerns.

First, both the Aspen Hill Civic Association and the Aspen Hill Homeowners Group were only made aware of the proposed relocation of the Blair G. Ewing Center within the last four (4) days, during the very week in which the Board of Education was scheduled to hold its public hearings on the CIP. While I very much appreciate Mr. Crispell having given both organizations a heads-up, I respectfully submit that this did not give us sufficient time to make the larger community fully aware of the issue. Had we been given more than four days' notice, I have no doubt there would have been far greater community involvement on the subject of the proposed relocation.

Second, I must also point out what strike me as straightforward problems of location and infrastructure. To wit, high schools and special schools are often located on major roads, while most elementary schools are located on secondary or tertiary roads, and are embedded in residential neighborhoods. The Blair G. Ewing Center fits this pattern, largely because it draws students from all over the County. In contrast, English Manor Elementary is tucked away among private residences, and when it operated as a neighborhood elementary school, most of the students it served lived nearby and could walk to school. Obviously, relocating the Blair G. Ewing Center to English Manor would create numerous problems for local residents, as buses from all over the County would be converging twice a day in the heart of an otherwise-quiet neighborhood.

Third - and this may be the greatest cause for concern in the community - many of the students enrolled in the Alternative Education Programs (AEPs) have behavioral problems, which can at times be very serious. From the Board's own documents, the AEP serves students with "behavioral and/or attendance problems, as well as students who have been involved in a serious disciplinary action that warrants a recommendation of expulsion", and students who have had "involvement with controlled substances, serious bodily injury, and/or weapons." The fact that the Blair G. Ewing Center is currently surrounded by lush parkland and is not adjacent to residential neighborhoods may well be the reason the site was originally chosen, and is moreover a compelling reason to keep the Center right where it is.

Lastly, I understand funds have already been allocated for the necessary improvements to the Blair G. Ewing Center. I have to wonder then, if the real reason for proposing the facility's relocation is a desire to use the Avery Road site for a new transportation depot. The existing Shady Grove Transportation Depot on Crabbs Branch Way is slated to be razed to make way for residences, with no replacement site yet confirmed. I know this is not the fault of the Board of Education, but it strikes me as a planning process that puts the cart before the horse, and as such, does not serve the best interests of either the AEP students nor the interests of the residents who live near the former English Manor Elementary School.

For these reasons, I must at this time state my personal opposition to the proposed relocation of the Blair G. Ewing Center, and inform this Board that there is similar opposition within the AHCA and the Aspen Hill community. If this does go forward, I do not doubt the community will become more informed and engaged, and the AHCA will provide further input on the matter. I thank the Board of Education for considering my opinion, and I urge you to reject the portions of the CIP that deal with this proposed relocation.

Sincerely,
Jamison M. Adcock
Vice President of the Aspen Hill Civic Association