

**SW Area Boundary Study  
Committee Member Emails  
December 11, 2015 to December 15, 2015**

Prepared by the Baltimore County Public Schools

Office of Strategic Planning, December 15, 2015

## Brocato, Christopher J.

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**From:** Kitchel James  
**Sent:** Sunday, December 13, 2015 8:14 PM  
**To:**

**Cc:**

**Subject:** Sigh. Well, OK, maybe there is a useful option after all. <g>

**Categories:** Orange Category

Dear fellow committee members, BCPS staff and consultants and Board of Education members:

Although my previously-stated concerns about the process remain and continue to be validated by the process itself, it is apparent that we will be following the current road to the end of the journey.

Given that, I am requesting a modification to the option that, from my observation, both has substantial support and seems to do the best job of addressing the needs of the SW area. That option is #3.2a and the modification I am requesting is the movement of Planning Blocks 354, 510 and 543 from CES back to HES. I will try to thoroughly address the relevant issues as briefly as I can. My apologies if I inadvertently overlooked any significant 3.2a problems.

1. Regarding support, 3.2a was nominated by a majority of the small groups, if not all of them, at our last meeting. In discussions with a number of schools last Wednesday, 3.2a was either the most palatable or in the top 3 for each school with whom I discussed the options.
2. One of the 3.2a discussion items is that it does not provide any “relief” for Johnnycake ES. First, as was discussed at the last meeting, the input from the Johnnycake community was decidedly in favor of pursuing the more equitable option of a new school, rather than accepting any relief through this process. Second, again as has been discussed, the extent of the relief that has any support at all is minimal in terms of numbers and is problematic in terms of eventual middle school attendance and the impact on the community and the school.
3. Resultant school utilization is a concern. But no option is perfect in this, the utilization changes from option to option are fairly small in any case and the utilization concern seems largely driven by the question of whether sufficient value is being gained for the money, time and effort expended. Resultant

utilization should not be the primary value consideration. I will address other more critical value outcomes below. I would also submit that under use today is intelligent capacity planning tomorrow. All the input that has been gathered from real estate agents and mortgage brokers indicates that housing stock in this area is undergoing a generational transition.

4. 3.2a – with the requested modifications – stacks up well regarding other important parameters such as diversity across schools, number of students impacted, transportation/walkability and school-specific issues addressed.
5. There are some Hillcrest-specific items that 3.2a addresses that I would like to review. First, in the PB 525/462-464 area, neighborhood concerns are addressed and the “dividing that area among three schools” problem present in options such as 3.1 and 3.1a is avoided. Second, with the requested modifications, concerns from the neighborhoods in those PBs are addressed, including the paucity of east/west transportation options to CES. Part of the requested modifications do entail sending children to HES who would then go to AMS for middle school. Overwhelming community input seems to indicate that this is a known and accepted anomaly. That desire and anomaly is also present in PB 351. Regardless of my personal support for the inclusion of PB 351 in a new HES boundary, however, the fact remains that 351 is closer to CES than the PBs to be added back in and there are more transportation options from 351, especially after the County makes the walkability improvements to the new CES area that will be required regardless of who walks there and from where.
6. Adding the requested PBs back into HES will somewhat lessen the amount of overcrowding relief provided to the school. First, it is obvious what the HES community’s position is on the “overcrowding versus leaving HES” question. But beyond that, and from some factual perspectives, adding those PBs back in still allows for substantial relief. HES will either no longer be overcrowded at all or will be far less than today. The state, for example, doesn’t even recognize a school as qualifying for relief until it reaches 115% of state-rated capacity (SRC) and Hillcrest, if it is overcrowded at all, will be well under that. Additionally, HES will now be the oldest, most dilapidated school in the core Catonsville area. That fact, and the attendant problems, will need to be addressed regardless of how many students are at HES. One of the areas of greatest concern is the old “temporary” modular 1<sup>st</sup> grade wing, represented by the infamous 1<sup>st</sup> grade boy’s bathroom. HES’ current SRC is 667. BCPS’ upper limit for elementary schools seems to be about 715-720. Given that the 1<sup>st</sup> grade wing needs to be replaced anyway, perhaps it will be possible to do so with an addition that raises HES’ SRC from 667 to 715-720, thereby providing some 50 odd additional seats.
7. Finally, in terms of the value question in paragraph 3 and relief provided to Hillcrest, please let us remember that – contrary to some perceptions – this has *\*never\** been all or even primarily about Hillcrest. As someone who has been involved for some time now, I can personally attest to the motivations and issues involved. We should not forget that Relay was, by percentage, at one point recently the *\*most\** overcrowded ES in the county. They are getting relief. We should not forget about Westowne’s substantial overcrowding or their justly famous air conditioning campaign. They are getting relief. We should not forget about Catonsville Elementary’s host of issues from life/safety to capacity to footprint to air conditioning and so on. They are getting relief. Other schools are benefiting from the attention and investment in the SW area. I would submit, then, that a bit of under use here and there or not achieving maximum possible overcrowding relief for Hillcrest pales in comparison to benefits this incredible and unparalleled simultaneous investment provides.

I respectfully request that option 3.2a be modified as described and presented to the committee for consideration this coming Wednesday, 17 December.

Thanks.

Jim Kitchel

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**Brocato, Christopher J.**

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**From:** Jane Allen  
**Sent:** Sunday, December 13, 2015 9:24 PM  
**To:**

**Cc:**  
**Subject:** Re: Dear Committee Members....

Committee Members,

I too have been feeling very uncomfortable with not giving Johnnycake relief. I believe there were others in my group that felt the same way. If we don't give relief to Johnnycake I feel as if we are proposing a double standard that is counter to our objectives. I am saddened that Shaunta had the experience described below. I believe we need to discuss Johnnycake at Wednesday's meeting and align facts with the stated objectives. I believe this will help us present the best possible option(s) to the superintendent.

Mr. Cropper, could we start by going over our initial parameters/objectives so we can keep them in mind as we continue our discussions?

Respectfully,  
Jane Allen  
Relay Parent

## Brocato, Christopher J.

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**From:** Detwiler, Cara D  
**Sent:** Sunday, December 13, 2015 9:52 PM  
**To:**

**Cc:**  
**Subject:** RE: Dear Committee Members....

As a representative from Johnnycake, I can confidently say that our principal is certainly speaking for our community. The community does want relief, but disrupting the lives of 70 kids doesn't actually provide us relief. Instead, it leaves us vulnerable for understaffing. The families who would have to leave have vociferously said that they don't want to leave and that if they do have to leave, they don't want to cross Rt. 40 (with no disrespect to Westchester, I think it's a safety and convenience issue more than anything else.) The community has expressly stated, as can be seen in the surveys, email logs, and as I have discussed with my students' families that we all feel that we need to be rallying behind a movement for an addition and not what feels like a token gesture of relief that doesn't actually provide relief. Our principal is a stellar communicator and is very in touch with our community. We are lucky to have an advocate like her and we appreciate the committee's concern for our overcrowding. If you really want to support our community, you will help us by throwing support in the options that leave our school as is to create minimal disruption while we build momentum to campaign for an addition. Thanks!

-Cara Detwiler, teacher, Johnnycake Elementary

## Brocato, Christopher J.

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**From:** Kitchel James  
**Sent:** Sunday, December 13, 2015 10:10 PM  
**To:**

**Cc:**  
**Subject:** RE: Dear Committee Members....

I have to agree with Cara. We tried to go down the road of providing substantial relief to Johnnycake through this process. We ended up with an option that the committee did not support, and one that we mostly seemed to recognize would not get any support from the wider stakeholder community, for better or worse.

Also, at a certain point, my discomfort would start to run in the other direction - if, through all mechanisms and by all accounts, a community has spoken, who are we to decide that our judgement is better and should be substituted for that of those most affected? Jane and Shaunta, I attribute only the best of motives to you, seriously. But at a certain point - if we continue to insist on providing what most charitably can be described as minimal relief, in the face of community opposition - do we not become patronizing and disrespectful to the very part of our community we want to help?

Cara and the other Johnnycake folks - there is no secret sauce or magic bullet. But, for what it is worth, I am more than happy to meet with any and everyone from your school who would be interested, to share what insights we gained by going through the process that resulted in the current construction process.

Thanks. Jim.

## Brocato, Christopher J.

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**From:** CHI B  
**Sent:** Monday, December 14, 2015 1:22 AM  
**To:** Kitchel James  
**Cc:**

**Subject:** Re: Dear Committee Members....

Dear Boundary Study Committee Members,

It's becoming more apparent that many, but not all, believe we as a committee have a moral responsibility to provide relief to overcrowding within the Southwest study area now and not at a later date. While I too agree additional capacity is needed for Johnnycake Elementary beyond the proposed relief that is being proposed with the options from the December 9 meeting, we need to be aware of the current economic climate. Refer to article in the Sun, <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/politics/bs-md-debt-threatens-projects-20151211-story.html>. I hope there will be no implications with Relay and Lansdowne Elementary construction.

Also, we need to be aware that according to the "2014-2015 School Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance Report and Maps" presented by Baltimore County Department of Planning April 2015, 30 of the 76 elementary schools in Baltimore County are at or over 115% of their State Rated Capacity (SRC). Of the 30 elementary schools, 14 are worse off than Johnnycake Elementary. We cannot expect that BCPS is going to keep the funds flowing to the Southwest Area for additional schools/additions for Johnnycake Elementary or Hillcrest Elementary,(Refer to James Kitchel email 12/13/2015, 8:13 PM, Issue #6) and ignore other parts of the County.

So let us be mindful with utilizing our new facilities to provide relief where we can.

Thank you,

Kind regards,

Chris Burk, P.E., Prof.L.S.

Community Member, Westowne Elementary



## Brocato, Christopher J.

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**From:** Kitchel James  
**Sent:** Monday, December 14, 2015 9:31 AM  
**To:** CHI B  
**Cc:**

**Subject:** RE: Dear Committee Members....

Chris, I agree that there are challenges. It isn't fully apparent to me, though, that they all run in the same direction. Contrast your Sun article (which clearly makes the point, btw, that higher education is far more likely to be impacted) with other news about the state's \$500M surplus. Also, given the other compelling and politically sensitive aspects of the Johnnycake situation, it is also not apparent that they need to be the most overcrowded school in the County in order to justify a new school.

My support, however, of the Johnnycake community's request to NOT be given any "relief" now is not predicated on some unrealistic hope that they are magically going to get a new school in the next year or two . . . because that ain't gonna happen! <g> (And I am not saying that is your position.) My support of their request is based on that fact this current process is not going to provide substantial relief in terms of overcrowding and – more importantly – that the community does not want to pay the price for this "relief" and the facts of that cost support their desire. And they are clearly making that decision in contrast to their current situation, not just in hopes of getting a new school.

Based on the facts and the request, I believe my more compelling moral responsibility to support a community's right to self-determination.

Thanks. Jim.

## Brocato, Christopher J.

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**From:** Shaunta Chapple  
**Sent:** Monday, December 14, 2015 11:13 AM  
**To:** Kitchel James  
**Cc:**

**Subject:** Re: Dear Committee Members....

Good morning,

When a community learns of the possibility of relief being provided to their children only to find that outlying communities (for various reasons) are rejecting each effort that will make a substantial difference, frustration mounts, and that frustration should not be masked as anything else. It is the frustration of a community that says: To "them," I don't matter because I don't own my home...I don't matter because I only paid \$100,000 for my home...my son's education does not matter because he receives free lunch....my daughter's education is not priority because she is Black...our family does not matter because we did not surpass the poverty level although I put in 40 hours at work each week.

I come back to the discussion about property values, single-family homes, transportation routes, etc. These are things that are superficial, and should mean little when up against the education of our children. When a child is in a class with so many children that he can't get the necessary assistance needed to understand a concept, this is a problem. How creative is a teacher's lesson plan when it is developed and organized in a closet? Are there textbooks available for each child in severely overcrowded schools? Schools comprised of mostly minority or poor (excuse my politically incorrect term) children do not perform poorly because the children were born stupid. They perform poorly because of a lack of resources. I look at my own children who had the advantage of attending Relay once I graduated from nursing school and moved away from Lansdowne, where the zoned school was Riverview. My children consistently perform at advanced proficiency, and though I would love to think that this is because of my awesome genetics and parenting, I have to be honest and admit that much of this is the product of their phenomenal school.

I am not taking anything away from Johnnycake- I know little about the school, but I am sure with bright young minds eager to learn, and dedicated educators and administrators like Cara and Bre-Anne, it is as great a school as any other throughout the county. But when it comes to resources, they are most likely lacking in their severely overcrowded state. The staff, the parents, and most important- the children- should not have to endure the harsh realities of severely overcrowded conditions when there are two schools in close proximity that are expanding capacity- this should have been a no-brainer. There are options that we could have considered that may have put Westowne at or over capacity and I can't help but wonder why anyone would have had a problem with that. Why not have two schools both minimally over capacity than one that is severely overcrowded?

Johnnycake has done exactly what the community members with the most misplaced intentions wanted- they got tired and gave up hope, deciding to hold onto the possibility of relief in another form, at another time. To push back against this as a committee...to extend ourselves, our efforts, and our compassion and say "Johnnycake, you don't have to wait, we are going to help NOW" is not patronizing them or undermining self-determination. It is caring.

I work in healthcare, and sometimes, patients do not want what is best for their health. Healthcare providers typically do not throw in the towel easily and say, "Well I tried, he doesn't want the chemo" and just let the patient die. We evaluate the "why".....we find creative approaches, we educate the patient- we exhaust all options, and then, if the patient still does not want treatment, we can feel at peace knowing that we did our part, we empowered the patient to make an informed decision, and truly honor self-determination.

My questions to everyone... Have we tried everything? Have we really considered scenarios that will genuinely help them (giving the side eye and passing it over doesn't count)? Has Johnnycake's community been educated on the way that fiscal dollars are allocated and spent? Are they aware as a whole of the implications of their children being in overcrowded conditions long-term? Has Westchester or Westowne leadership said "We welcome you with open arms if we can be of service to your community?"

The only way that I will place a sticker on a map that does not help relieve Johnnycake is if Johnnycake's leadership in partnership with BCPS develops a document that explains pertinent information regarding overcrowding, capital projects, etc. If a survey is conducted after all families have been made privy to the information they really need to make such a profound decision, and the respondents say "We will take our chances, leave our school alone," then, I can honor and respect that and be at peace about it. Any there volunteers to pull that off in two days ;- ) ???

I will close this email on a personal note because I think it may help drive home why this issue is so important:

I received a decent education through the BCPS public school system, 1st through 12th grade, and all along the way, I was prepared to succeed. Because of this, when I made the untimely decision to become a mother at 18, I did not have to let that define me. I knew the value of education, and I knew that if I just obtained the necessary education, I would not have to become anyone's statistic. Now- I am a Master's prepared Registered Nurse, and I will be applying to a PhD nursing program next fall. I am able to afford to live in areas with the nicest public schools- my gift to my children.

We have children in a school, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and the quality of their education is what is at stake. Do not make a decision on Wednesday that may impede upon these children's opportunity to get the best education that they can, as soon as they can get it, and may eventually liberate them from some of the pitfalls human beings fall victim to from time to time.

Have a great day everyone, and see you at Wednesday's meeting!

Shaunta

## Brocato, Christopher J.

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**From:** Kitchel James  
**Sent:** Monday, December 14, 2015 12:55 PM  
**To:** Shaunta Chapple  
**Cc:**

**Subject:** RE: Dear Committee Members....

Shaunta, I have to take issue with some of the characterizations in this email. First, and most personally, I am not operating out of misplaced intentions. As anyone who has either been involved with or followed this process for any length of time can tell you, I have been foursquare for providing the most relief and involving as many parts of our community as possible. I have both talked the talk and walked the walk. Secondly, I am not aware of any evidence to support your characterization of the Johnnycake community, that “they got tired and gave up hope”. Rather, I find their responses so far to be hopeful, energetic and focused on positive aspects of their own community that they do not want to sacrifice on the altar of insubstantial relief. Their advocacy for a new school is not the act of a tired or hopeless community but rather of a community that is justly questioning where their equity is – and true equity in the form of resources devoted - not a bit of adjustment in the degree of overcrowding.

Frankly, in addition to all the reasons I have already stated as to why I support Johnnycake’s quest for equity, there is another reason why I do not want to force them to accept insubstantial relief. I do not want to give anyone – politicians, BoE members, whomever – an excuse to **\*not\*** fully address their needs because we provided just enough of a fig leaf, through this process.

Much of this question hinges on capacity and this is one of the reasons I am less than pleased with the process overall. With 11 schools, there is simply not enough capacity to go around. We did not provide more relief to Johnnycake because of the number of children who would have to be disrupted, because of transportation issues, because of middle school boundaries and so forth. But even if there was some way to make all those issues disappear, there is only so much relief available and that is the crux of the issue.

Finally, I am afraid that your health care analogy speaks directly to one of my points. And I am not attributing any bad intention to you when I say this. It is obvious that you care and that you are bringing everything you have to this process. But this is not a health care situation. “We” do not possess, by virtue of extensive training and experience, more knowledge about this condition than the Johnnycake “patient”. We are not more qualified than they are – they know exactly what they are dealing with now and what they are up against in their fight for equity. We should not put ourselves in the role of their “education care provider” and try to make decisions on their behalf.

Thanks. Jim.

## Brocato, Christopher J.

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**From:** Obi Linton  
**Sent:** Monday, December 14, 2015 9:36 PM  
**To:** Kitchel.James  
**Cc:**

**Subject:** Re: Dear Committee Members....

Good Evening Committee Members,

As the only parent and Committee member from Johnnycake in attendance at the December 9<sup>th</sup> meeting, I am pleased to see my school receive additional attention from the Committee members. The parents of Johnnycake have felt as if the school's needs have been ignored by the larger Southwest Area and the Board in general. I suppose for various reasons all schools may feel that way, but more on that later. For now, and on behalf of the parents and our children, I thank you for this vibrant discussion.

I'd also like to thank both Principal Fortkamp and Cara Detwiler, both of whom have eloquently represented Johnnycake's needs at and within the Committee meeting framework, while at the same time trying very hard to avoid any semblance of favoritism or self promotion. I think it's worth noting that there has been no school based, social media or broader web based effort to persuade parents to choose one proposed map over the other. Instead, we have encouraged all parents to review the information on the website and participate in this open process (which has its flaws). This has happened at our PTA meetings, at evening events and through email. As a parent participant and, as an attorney I respect their restraint – even while they are well aware of the challenges the school faces.

Their example is one of trusting the process and the overall procedure established in the beginning by this Committee. While the Committee may not have noticed it, many Johnnycake parents have also participated and monitored the data and information distributed for the general public's review. When asked to participate publicly, Johnnycake spoke with a very loud voice, completing over 300 surveys. Based on the reaction I saw at the December 9<sup>th</sup> meeting, some of the Committee members were surprised at how loud, and how focused Johnnycake's community participated.

On December 9<sup>th</sup>, I encouraged my group, and others who sought my input, to listen to the members of the Johnnycake community and leave the school borders as is. Within my group, I supported those proposals that did not alter Johnnycake's current borders, but I did not object to including other alternatives as a few members wished, because they noted that leaving the borders as is could be seen as a weakness since it did not provide "relief" as we have defined it within this process. Each member has to participate in the manner they feel best, with the intent of representing the community as a whole, so I've no objection to that. In carrying out our work however, we have consistently sought and in many cases followed the community's input. When asked, the Johnnycake community spoke with a loud voice and, were clear in their preference. To state it as plainly as possible, the Committee's definition of "relief" by simply lowering enrollment numbers doesn't provide true "relief" in every instance. As we have seen, it could make certain situations

worse. That's why community feedback is vital and, I believe was specifically welcomed and incorporated into this process. For transparency yes, for a political point or two - sure, but also to make sure we get this right. We have respected that input on several occasions already, to get to the maps we have now. I merely suggest that we do so again, because nothing that I have seen thus far would justify ignoring the wishes of the Johnnycake community.

So while I am pleased that this discussion is ongoing, as one of the parents at Johnnycake, I find it concerning and condescending to suggest that the Johnnycake community should be ignored or otherwise assumed to not know what's best for them. Their wishes should receive the same weight as other comments and feedback we have received; that it was voluminous and nearly unanimous suggests that it should receive even more deference. It should at least rise to the level of the same deference we have given other schools. No one has questioned the knowledge and understanding of the process for any other community. For example, we have relied on, and modified maps repeatedly for members of the Hillcrest and Catonsville communities when they completed surveys and came to meetings to express their concerns. We have relied on the County's plans, which are not yet funded or finalized, to leave Lansdowne at nearly 150% enrollment because of the Board's effort to build a new school there and the need to actually \*be and remain\* overcrowded to justify the effort and funding. As of today there's no projected date for opening. So, students at the school currently and for the next several years will continue to not receive the redistricting "relief" this Committee could offer them in exchange for potential benefits in the future. And, despite overcrowding in Edmondson Heights, we've not made any proposals to have children from that community benefit from the additional capacity the new schools in will provide although that, I suspect, is due to a myriad of reasons too involved to address in this email.

Principal Fortkamp precisely noted the issues with the "relief" being offered to Johnnycake. Here's the school wide and community wide impact in a nutshell:

- 1) Lower "numbers" at the school will result in a loss of teacher and counselor resources. This is of paramount concern since Johnnycake is a highly diverse community consisting of over 35 different cultures;
- 2) Faux "relief" – with housing turnover in the walking zone, increased pre-kindergarten enrollment and new housing construction near Security Mall, the removal of 80 children will not leave the school at the new, projected levels. We could easily surpass that with new enrollments in a year or two;
- 3) Johnnycake's actual building is overcrowded beyond the proposed "relief". The school currently has seven "learning cottages" in full use. Those temporary facilities have been used for years. They do not have bathroom facilities and, are outside of the school structure. As some of you may know, students in those cottages are exposed to the elements every day just to go to the restroom, the cafeteria or to participate in any additional activities in the main school building.

Even if 80 students were removed from Johnnycake, as proposed in some of our current maps, Johnnycake would still require use of four learning cottages and in all likelihood, use of the other three once the school year begins.

- 4) Finally, and perhaps worse of all, providing this "relief" creates the illusion of "taking care of Johnnycake" when that simply would not be the case. The relief as proposed impacts Johnnycake students the same as in the other school districts – broken communities, questions about middle school continuity, safety risks for students crossing roads, temperamental HVAC equipment, and the very real concern that not everyone wants "our" children in "their" schools.

Johnnycake, like Catonsville, Westowne and Relay, needs a new facility. Admittedly we are not first in line, but the parents know that we need to go through the process to get a new facility just like any other community. It won't happen tomorrow, but it does need to happen. If the Board needs even more parents to become more active and present so that it can begin to more effectively address issues of which it is already aware, then we'll need to take those steps as necessary. As a parent, I can't help but notice that the last four expansion projects (including Lansdowne in the works) have been in neighborhoods "South" of Route 40. That pattern is something to look into going forward.

Johnnycake is a good school full of bright children, loving families and supportive, caring teachers and staff. We too need support and resources, just like every other community - not to have our comments dismissed as being ill informed. As a former Johnnycake PTA Executive Board member and still active member, I appreciate the offers of assistance from those community, parents and organizations that have gone through this before. You know full well the importance of a safe and fully functional school. I suspect we will take you up on your offers of support and guidance in due course.

Take care. I look forward to our final meeting on the 16<sup>th</sup>.

Obi Linton, Esq.