

OPINION

Don't Lump Poor Students Together

Boundary changes should not create schools with high concentrations of poverty.

Under one proposal, one new elementary school in Fairfax County, Coppermine in Herndon, would open next fall with almost 60 percent of its students poor enough to qualify subsidized meals.

Meanwhile at Oak Hill, the most affluent of the six elementary schools in this boundary change decision, the percentage of poor students would drop from 4.4 to 3.4 percent.

At the other end of the county, the opening of another new school, Laurel Hill, will bring a boundary change there as well. In one proposal, Lorton Station would see its percentage of poor students increase to 41 percent, up from 35, while another school in that boundary study, Silverbrook, would see its percentage of poor students drop to 3 percent from 11 percent.

Students achieve more in schools that do not have high concentrations of poor students, and the county should use boundary change opportunities to improve these ratios.

There is no easy way to change school boundaries, as members of the Fairfax school board can no doubt attest. They are in the midst of another round of redrawing school boundaries, this time because of the imminent opening of two new elementary schools.

Some of these families have been through multiple boundary studies and changes. In the last decade, homes in the northeastern Floris

district have undergone six major school boundary changes.

But some of the proposals on the table both in the north and south part of the county should never have made it to the drawing board, because they would cluster poor students in schools at a much higher rate than the county average.

EDITORIAL

Overall, about 20 percent of students in Fairfax County are poor enough to receive subsidized or free meals. These are students from families who are poor by any reasonable measure.

Research shows that performance lags in schools with high concentrations of poor students, and one set of guidelines suggests that school populations should be no more than 40 percent students who are poor.

There are places where this is nearly impossible, whole school districts that have high concentrations of poverty. Not so here in Fairfax where the average household income is more than \$100,000, the wealthiest county in the country by recent measures.

Yet in 31 elementary schools in Fairfax County, more than 40 percent of the students are poor. That's 31 out of 137 schools, or more than 22 percent of the county's elementary schools with a student body with a very high poverty rate, defined as 40 percent or more students receiving subsidized lunch.

Seventeen elementary schools in Fairfax County have a poverty rate of more than 50

Poverty Concentrated

On average, about 20 percent of students in Fairfax County Public Schools are poor. Some schools with high concentrations of poor students:

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL POVERTY RATE

Annandale Terrace, Annandale	57.19%
Bailey's, Arts and Sciences	54.09%
Beech Tree, Falls Church	41.81%
Belvedere, Falls Church	43.06%
Braddock, Fairfax	49.33%
Bren Mar Park, Alexandria	47.76%
Bucknell, Mount Vernon	53.85%
Cameron, Alexandria	55.61%
Crestwood, Springfield	55.51%
Dogwood, Reston	60.28%
Garfield, Springfield	42.90%
Glen Forest, Falls Church	67.44%
Graham Road, Falls Church	76.76%
Groveton, Mount Vernon	58.44%
Hollin Meadows, Mount Vernon	44.48%
Hutchinson, Herndon	45.29%
Hybla Valley, Mount Vernon	81.11%
Lynbrook, Springfield	67.92%
McNair, Herndon	41.66%
Mount Eagle, Mount Vernon	75.17%
Mount Vernon Woods, Mount Vernon	77.99%
Parklawn, Alexandria	59.22%
Riverside, Mount Vernon	60.61%
Timber Lane, Falls Church	51.91%
Washington Mill, Mount Vernon	42.64%
Westlawn, Falls Church	47.95%
Weyanoke, Alexandria	67.73%
Woodburn, Falls Church	41.39%
Woodlawn, Mount Vernon	55.41%
Woodley Hills, Mount Vernon	55.39%

percent, with some much higher.

It's one more reason for the school board to consider a county-wide boundary study. (Another big reason: some schools are overcrowded while others have many open seats.)

— MARY KIMM,

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Embrace All Beauty

To the Editor:

It is so sad to read of the misguided Restonians who can't see beyond the immediate present and on to the long term. How can they miss the excitement that the rest of us feel at seeing the progressive restoration of our stream beds? Admittedly, the scene is tough just after demolition has taken place. But how long is it — weeks? — until the ugliness of eroded stream banks is erased by thoughtful landscaping?

Under the circumstances, it seems necessary to point out the obvious. Woods are not the only natural areas. Open fields have their beauty. I strongly recommend comparing the finished areas of restored stream beds with any of the areas designated for restoration. Thereafter, apologies for the unnecessary hysteria would be in order.

Bob Simon
Reston

The State of Northern Virginia

BY KENNETH R. "KEN" PLUM
STATE DELEGATE (D-36)

There have been many calls for Northern Virginia to secede and become the 51st state since Supervisor Martha Pennino first suggested the idea in the 1970s. An article, "So Long, Virginia," in the November issue of Washingtonian contains the latest proposal. "Northern Virginia sends millions to Richmond — and gets pennies back," the article opens. "It's one of the world's most dynamic regions, while other parts of the state are still fighting the Civil War. Why not secede and become the 51st state?"

As one who has dealt with the challenges presented by the diversity of the commonwealth for many decades, I understand the frustrations and concerns that lead to suggestions of secession. The problem is not unique to Virginia,



however. Many states have an upstate-downstate, a suburban vs. rural, a have and have-nots problem. There is not likely to be a move to make rich states and poor states any time soon across the country. As with any problem, we need to carefully review a proposed solution to see if it brings the expected relief.

The Washingtonian article defines the new state as including the counties of Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, Prince William, Fauquier, and Stafford and the City of Alexandria and other cities contained within the region. Currently those jurisdictions send the most progressive and the most conservative representatives to the Virginia General Assembly. If those persons were elected to the legislature of the new State of Northern Virginia, we would potentially have the same stalemate on issues like transportation as we have

now. The present delegation from the region includes the strongest proponents of regional transportation solutions and the biggest obstructionists. After the legislature meets a few times in the proposed new state there may well be calls for a further secession to have a Middle Virginia.

The new state may not prove to be the bargain that some have suggested. Although counties under current law can take over control of their own roads, only Arlington County in the region has chosen to do so. The others have found the alternative to state control of roadways to be too expensive. Starting a Northern Virginia Department of Transportation would be a costly undertaking. And we will need to add a few more colleges. No way that George Mason University could meet the demand for a region that has the highest percentage of any region of students in colleges throughout Vir

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THE CONNECTION

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