Supplement A
FY 2011–2016 CIP
October 23, 2009

Superintendent's Recommendation to Consolidate Monocacy Elementary School at Poolesville Elementary School

Background

Enrollments at Monocacy and Poolesville elementary schools have been declining for a number of years. Enrollment at Monocacy Elementary School, at 176 this year, is below the Board of Education desired minimum enrollment level of 300 students. Low enrollment levels compromise the educational program delivery for students and result in very high operating costs on a per student basis. The projected enrollment for Monocacy Elementary School could be completely served at Poolesville Elementary School without requiring any additional capacity. Consolidation at Poolesville Elementary School would result in a school of approximately 500 to 520 students. This is a more effective enrollment level for the educational program and a more efficient enrollment level in terms of operating costs. See Attachment A for a map of the service areas of Monocacy and Poolesville elementary schools.

Recommendation

I am recommending the consolidation of Monocacy Elementary School at Poolesville Elementary School, effective August 2010. The very low enrollment levels at Monocacy Elementary School, and the space available at Poolesville Elementary School to house Monocacy Elementary School students, require that this recommendation be put forward. I am aware of how difficult it can be for a community to have a school closed. However, I believe the educational benefits for students who will be consolidated at Poolesville Elementary School are significant. In addition, the net annual cost savings of one million dollars—that will result from the closure of Monocacy Elementary School—is a major benefit as well. In this difficult budget environment we must take actions that can reduce costs. This action reduces cost and enhances delivery of the educational program.

In the case of school closures and consolidations, the school system is required to follow procedures of the Maryland State Board of Education set forth in Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) Chapter 13A. Chapter 13A of COMAR states that "each local school board shall establish procedures to be used in making decisions on school closings." Chapter 13A also includes eight factors that need to be considered in a school closure decision. The COMAR school closure and consolidation requirements can be found at the following web site:

www.dsd.state.md.us/comar/SearchTitle.aspx?scope=13A
Once at the web site, enter the following in the search box: 13a.02.09

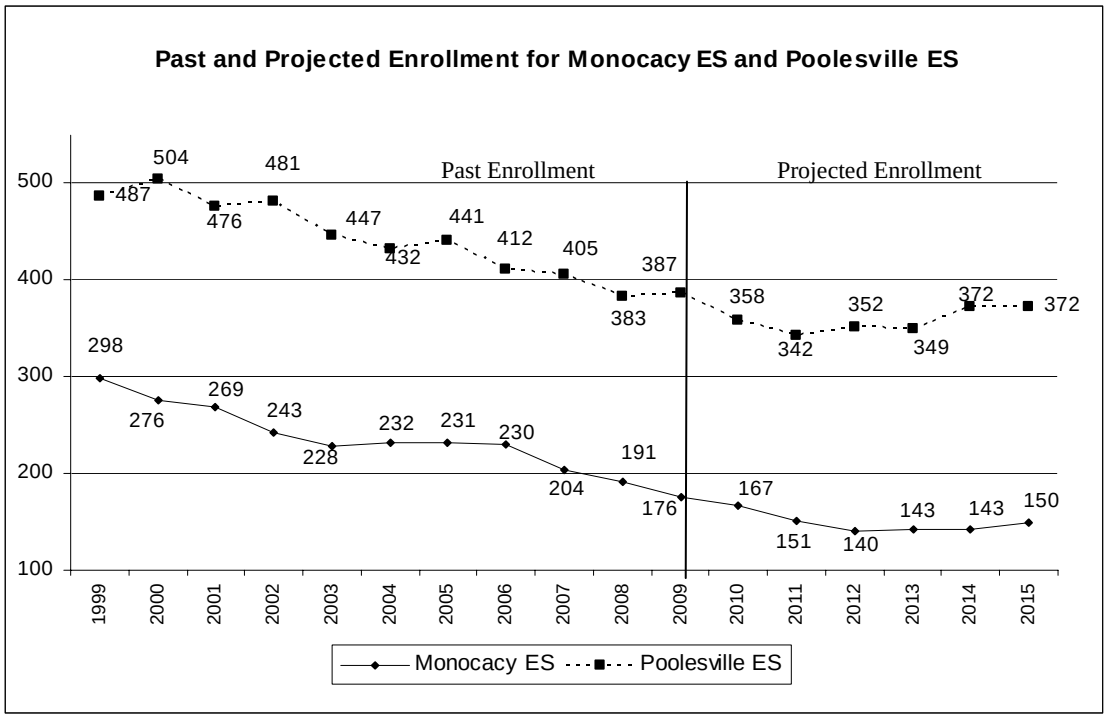
The Board of Education's Long-Range Educational Facilities Planning policy (FAA) and Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) regulation (FAA-RA) also need to be considered in developing the procedures to be used in making the decision to close Monocacy Elementary School. The remainder of this recommendation addresses the eight factors that COMAR lists for consideration, and describes the procedures I am recommending the Board of Education adopt for the closure of Monocacy Elementary School.

Factors for Consolidation of Monocacy Elementary School at Poolesville Elementary School

1. Student Enrollment Trends

Enrollment at Monocacy Elementary School has been declining for a number of years. In 1999 the school enrolled 298 students, while this year enrollment is only 176 students. Enrollment in this year's kindergarten class is only 18 students, and new enrollment projections show the school trending down further in enrollment, with a forecast of just 150 projected by the 2015–2016 school year. Efforts have been made over the years to increase the enrollment at Monocacy Elementary School by drawing students from the Poolesville Elementary School service area. Although a number of the students enrolled at Monocacy Elementary School do reside in the Poolesville Elementary School service area, enrollment has continued to drop at Monocacy Elementary School.

Over the past ten years enrollment at Poolesville Elementary School also has been declining. In 1999 enrollment was 487 and this year enrollment is down to 387. Poolesville Elementary School's capacity is 549. Enrollment projections for Poolesville Elementary School show little change in enrollment over the next six years, with 372 students projected for the 2015–2016 school year. Consequently, there is a considerable amount of excess capacity at Poolesville Elementary School throughout the six year forecast period. See graph below for enrollment trends.



The enrollment projected for Monocacy Elementary School can be completely served at Poolesville Elementary School without requiring any additional capacity. This would result in a school in the 500 to 520 enrollment range over the next six years. See table below for school enrollments compared to capacities.

Enrollment Projections for Monocacy and Poolesville Elementary Schools								
Current Service Areas								
		Preliminary Enrollment	**Projected Enrollment**					
Schools	**Capacity**	**2009-10**	**2010-11**	**2011-12**	**2012-13**	**2013-14**	**2014-15**	**2015-16**
Monocacy E.S.	**206**	**176**	**167**	**151**	**140**	**143**	**143**	**150**
space		*30*	*39*	*55*	*66*	*63*	*63*	*56*
Poolesville E.S.	**549**	**387**	**358**	**342**	**352**	**349**	**372**	**372**
space		*162*	*191*	*207*	*197*	*200*	*177*	*177*
Consolidated Service Area, beginning in August 2010								
Poolesville E.S.	**549**	**387**	**525**	**493**	**492**	**492**	**515**	**522**
space		*162*	*24*	*56*	*57*	*57*	*34*	*27*

An analysis of Monocacy Elementary School's enrollment by place of residence shows that of the 176 students enrolled this school year, only 112 reside in the Monocacy Elementary School service area. Sixty students reside in the Poolesville Elementary School service area, and another four reside in other parts of the upcounty area. In addition, this analysis shows that only twelve kindergarten students at Monocacy Elementary School reside in the school's service area. This enrollment information clearly indicates that the Monocacy Elementary School service area is too sparsely populated to generate a desirable level of enrollment at the school. See Attachment B for a dot map showing the location of students attending Monocacy Elementary School this year.

The long-range prospects for enrollment increases in the Monocacy Elementary School service area are limited. Monocacy Elementary School serves a rural area of the county. Residential development in this part of Montgomery County is very limited since public water and sewer is not available and the area is within the county's Agricultural Reserve. The Agricultural Reserve is an area that has been set aside to preserve agricultural uses and open space. Zoning in the Agricultural Reserve limits residential lots to 25 acres. The only housing plan of any size being contemplated is called "Barnesville Oaks" and is located at a farm property in the southeast quadrant of Peach Tree Road and Whites Store Road, southeast of Barnesville. The owner seeks to build 31 single family homes. Staff from the Montgomery County Planning Department indicates that in the final plan only about 24 homes may be feasible. This number of homes would generate approximately eight elementary school students. In addition, the timeframe on plan approval and construction is uncertain.

The long-range prospects for enrollment increases in the Poolesville Elementary School service area also are limited, but not as severely as in the Monocacy Elementary School service area. The Poolesville Elementary School service area includes the Town of Poolesville where public water and sewer are provided. Officials in the Town of Poolesville have determined that there is sufficient water and sewer capacity to serve 410 more housing units over the long term. At the completion of these homes there will be no more water and sewer capacity available for residential development. Due to the poor housing market very few of the 410 housing units have proceeded to construction, even though they have been granted water and sewer allocations by the Town of Poolesville. Due to the poor housing market, the six-year forecast for Poolesville Elementary School does not include additional students from future housing construction. At full build-out an estimated 135 elementary school students, 75 middle school students, and 70 high school students will be generated by these additional housing units.

Town of Poolesville officials indicate that once the housing market improves approximately 30 housing units per year can be absorbed in the Poolesville housing market. This indicates that full build-out of the future housing would take about thirteen years. Therefore, the impact of additional housing on the enrollment at Poolesville Elementary School will be gradual. The impact of 135 additional elementary school students at Poolesville Elementary School, in addition to the 150 projected from the consolidation of Monocacy Elementary School, could raise enrollment at Poolesville Elementary School to around 655. An enrollment at this level would require a four to six room addition to the school at some point in the future. This is a very typical size elementary school for today, when most elementary schools are being constructed with 640 to 740 student capacities. Therefore, the future residential development potential in the Town of Poolesville can be accommodated, even with the consolidation of Monocacy Elementary School at Poolesville Elementary School.

2. Age or Condition of School Buildings

Monocacy Elementary School was originally opened in 1961, and was modernized in 1989. The school has a site size of 27 acres, a student capacity of 206, and a building square footage of 42,482. The school is in good condition. Monocacy Elementary School is served by well water and a septic system.

Poolesville Elementary School was originally opened in 1960 and was renovated, though not fully modernized, in 1978. The school has a site size of 12.3 acres, a student capacity of 549, and a building square footage of 64,803. The school is in good condition. Poolesville Elementary School is served by public water and sewer. A privately operating child care program is provided in the Poolesville Elementary School facility.

3. Transportation

Most elementary school students are transported to Monocacy and Poolesville elementary schools. The exception are students who live near Poolesville Elementary School who can safely walk to the school. Monocacy Elementary School has no walk area. As a result of efforts to increase enrollment at Monocacy Elementary School, transportation to the Monocacy Elementary School is provided throughout the Poolesville cluster, including the service areas of Monocacy and Poolesville elementary schools. One useful example of distances and travel times in this part of the county is the distance between the two elementary schools (7.8 miles) and the corresponding travel time (approximately17 minutes.)

Due to the rural nature of the Poolesville Cluster, travel distances are longer than in more suburban and urban areas of the county. However, these travel distances are somewhat offset by less highway congestion. The transportation impact of consolidating Monocacy Elementary School students at Poolesville Elementary School would include shorter travel distances and times for more than half the students enrolled at Monocacy Elementary School. Of the 176 students currently enrolled, 93 would have a reduced travel distance and time and 83 would have an increased travel distance and time under the consolidation. The basis of these calculations is detailed in the following paragraph.

The analysis of the location of students who attend Monocacy Elementary School (Attachment B) reveals that of the 176 students enrolled, 60 reside in the Poolesville Elementary School service area. These students would have a reduced travel distance and time under the consolidation. In

addition, some of these students who reside near Poolesville Elementary School could become walkers and not require bus transportation. Another 33 students who reside in the Monocacy Elementary School service area are located in the southern portion of the service area, and are closer to the Poolesville Elementary School than to Monocacy Elementary School. These students also would have a reduced travel distance and time under the consolidation. The remaining 83 students enrolled at Monocacy Elementary School this year would have an increase in travel distance and time under the consolidation.

In the Monocacy Elementary School service area, the most distant location from Poolesville Elementary School is the northeastern portion of the service area, where Old Hundred Road intersects State Quarry Road at the Frederick County line. This point is 5.3 miles from Monocacy Elementary School with a direct travel time of approximately 9 minutes, and 10.7 miles from Poolesville Elementary School with a direct travel time of approximately 21 minutes. It should be noted that these travel distances and times do not correspond directly to bus route distances and times. The experience of individual students would vary depending on the route of the bus and when they are picked up and dropped off.

4. Educational Programs

The level of enrollment at Monocacy Elementary School is well below the Board of Education's preferred minimum enrollment of 300 for elementary schools. By 2015–2016 enrollment at Monocacy Elementary School is projected to be at 150, one-half of the desired minimum level. Enrollment levels lower than 300 students can result in academic and programmatic issues. Small schools cannot offer as wide a range of programs as those with larger enrollment levels. For example, a small school with only one Grade 5 class would have fewer options to differentiate mathematics instruction than a school with multiple sections of Grade 5. Small schools must accommodate a wider range of student ability levels within one class of Grade 5 students, or create more combination classes across grade levels. Offerings such as instrumental music are challenged in small settings as it is difficult to fill out ensembles with fewer students.

Schools with low enrollment levels are unable to support as rich a variety of clubs and other extracurricular activities as larger schools. Small schools have difficulty balancing class sizes as enrollment patterns seldom divide neatly across grade levels. In schools where only one section exists for most grade levels or programs, there is little flexibility to reassign students to other sections if a situation should arise where personalities may come into conflict between students, parents, or teachers. MCPS promotes collaboration among teachers as a way to enrich instruction for students. In a school where nearly every educator is alone within their grade level or specialty there is little opportunity for such meaningful collaboration. Thus, the instructional program may suffer as educators have no one with whom they can discuss like programs. The recommendation to consolidate Monocacy Elementary School at Poolesville Elementary School would result in a highly desirable enrollment level, benefiting all students.

5. Racial Composition of Student Body

The racial and ethnic composition of Monocacy and Poolesville elementary schools are quite similar. The percent of enrollment in the Free and Reduced-price Meals System program (FARMS) and the English for Speakers of Other Languages program (ESOL) also are similar. The following table shows the current demographic characteristics of the two schools and the same characteristics under consolidation. There is no adverse impact in racial/ethnic, FARMS, or ESOL percentages under the consolidation.

Demograhic Composition of Monocacy and Poolesville Elementary Schools							
Current Service Areas							
	Percent Demographic Characteristics, 2009–10						
Schools	American Indian	African American	Asian American	Hispanic	White	FARMS	ESOL
Monocacy E.S.	1.1%	5.7%	4.5%	6.8%	81.9%	10.9%	3.4%
Poolesville E.S.	0.8%	8.5%	3.4%	10.1%	77.2%	14.9%	2.8%
Consolidated Service Area							
Poolesville E.S.	0.9%	7.6%	3.7%	9.1%	78.7%	13.7%	3.0%

FARMS refers to Free and Reduced Meals System. ESOL refers to English for Speakers of Other Languages program.

6. Financial Considerations

Financial considerations are an important factor for the recommendation to consolidate Monocacy Elementary School at Poolesville Elementary School. Operating an elementary school takes a certain level of administrative and support staff, over and above the teaching positions. By consolidating Monocacy Elementary School at Poolesville Elementary School administrative and support staff costs can be significantly reduced. The recommended consolidation will result in a net annual cost savings of about one million dollars.

7. Student Relocation

The recommendation to consolidate Monocacy Elementary School at Poolesville Elementary School is for the 2010–2011 school year. All Grades K-5 students would be relocated from Monocacy Elementary School to Poolesville Elementary School, beginning at the start of school in August 2010.

If the Board of Education approves the consolidation recommendation, I will direct MCPS staff at Monocacy and Poolesville elementary schools to work closely together to facilitate the consolidation in a smooth and sensitive manner. This transition will include open houses in spring 2010 at Poolesville Elementary School for Monocacy Elementary School students, and other activities intended to make these students familiar with the Poolesville Elementary School facility, and its staff and students. Comparable efforts have been very successful during school boundary changes and new school openings.

8. Impact on Community in Geographic Attendance Area for School Proposed to Be Closed and School to Which Students Will Be Relocated

The rural nature of the Monocacy Elementary School service area means that the school community is spread out. However, the school itself has undoubtedly created a sense of community and affiliation for its parents and students. Indeed, in rural areas with few commercial or public facilities, schools can be important anchors for the community. In making this recommendation I have struggled the most with the impact of my recommendation on the broader Monocacy community. The closure of Monocacy Elementary School will remove an important focus of community identity.

While acknowledging the impact on the broader Monocacy community, my recommendation must focus on the students, the educational program, and the costs of operating Monocacy Elementary School. As outlined in this recommendation a stronger, more comprehensive educational program for the students can be provided with the increased enrollment that consolidation will bring. In addition, in this austere fiscal environment we cannot justify the administrative and support costs necessary for a school with such a low enrollment level. The net annual cost savings of the consolidation is about one million dollars.

I believe the consolidation of Monocacy Elementary School at Poolesville Elementary School can bring a new sense of community. From a community perspective the Town of Poolesville is the most significant focal point of this upcounty area. Consolidating Monocacy Elementary School at the Poolesville Elementary School—in the Town of Poolesville—locates all elementary school students residing in the Poolesville Cluster in a single school. All Poolesville Cluster secondary school students attend schools in the Town of Poolesville. Over time I am confident that serving all Poolesville cluster elementary, middle, and high school students in the Town of Poolesville will create new affiliations and new connections among parents and students.

Procedures Leading Up to Board of Education Action on the Recommended Consolidation

The Long-Range Educational Facilities Planning policy (FAA) stipulates that an advisory committee will be established for a variety of facilities planning activities, including school closures and consolidations. (See "Position, #2" on page 2 of 5.) The associated Long-Range Educational Facilities Planning regulations (FAA-RA) references COMAR Chapter 13A as the source for procedures to close or consolidate schools. (See "VI. Community Involvement Processes, A. #4" on page 18 of 20.) Consistent with Policy FAA, Regulations FAA-RA and COMAR Chapter 13A, the following sequence of activities are recommended for review and action on the consolidation of Monocacy Elementary School at Poolesville Elementary School.

Board of Education Review and Action on Procedures

Activity	Timeline
Superintendent's recommendation (Supplement A)	Released October 23, 2009
Board of Education review and action on recommended procedures to follow, prior to future action on the superintendent's recommendation to consolidate Monocacy Elementary School at Poolesville Elementary School (Supplement A.)	November 5, 2009 – Work session on procedures Nov. 11, 12, 2009 – Public hearings on procedures November 19, 2009 – Action on procedures

Advisory Committee Activities and Schedule

Activity	Timeline
Superintendent's recommendation (Supplement A)	Released October 23, 2009
Formation of advisory committee comprised of representatives of Monocacy and Poolesville elementary schools.	Early December 2009
Advisory committee review and comment on the superintendent's recommendation. Committee facilitated by staff from the MCPS Division of Long-range Planning.	December 2009 — January 2010
Advisory committee report to superintendent and Board of Education.	Due January 29, 2010

Public Notification Actions and Schedule

Activity	Timeline
Superintendent's recommendation (Supplement A)	Released October 23, 2009
Superintendent's recommendation distributed to Monocacy and Poolesville elementary schools PTA leaders. Additional copies to be made available at the two schools and on the MCPS web site.	October 23, 2009 www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/planning/index2.shtml
Written notification of the school consolidation plan advertised in at least two local newspapers having general circulation in the geographic attendance area of affected schools. The newspaper notifications to include procedures that will be followed by the Board of Education in making its final decision.	November 2009 Newspaper notifications shall appear at least two weeks in advance of any public hearing held by the Board of Education on the proposed school closing.
Board of Education advertises public hearing on superintendent's recommended consolidation plan. Time limits for submission of oral and written testimony and data shall be clearly defined in the notification of the public meeting.	January 2010

Board of Education Public Hearing and Decision

Activity	Timeline
Public hearing on the superintendent's recommended consolidation plan. The public hearing shall take place before any final decision by the Board of Education is made to consolidate Monocacy Elementary School at Poolesville Elementary School.	February 2010
Final Board of Education action on the consolidation of Monocacy Elementary School at Poolesville Elementary School. The decision shall be announced at a public session and shall be in writing. The following apply: 1) The final decision shall include the rationale for the consolidation and address the impact of the consolidation on the eight factors discussed in the superintendent's recommendation (Supplement A.) 2) There shall be notification of the final decision of the Board of Education to the community in the geographic attendance area of the schools affected – both Monocacy and Poolesville elementary schools. 3) The final decision shall include notification of the right to appeal to the State Board of Education as set forth in COMAR Chapter 13A, Regulation .03	March 2010 The date of the Board of Education action shall be announced at least 90 days before the date the school is scheduled to be consolidated, but no later than April 30, 2010.

Appeal Procedure

Activity	Timeline
An appeal of the MCPS Board of Education action can be made to the State Board of Education. The State Board of Education will uphold the decision of the local board of education unless the facts presented indicate its decision was arbitrary and unreasonable, or illegal.	An appeal must be submitted within 30 days of the MCPS Board of Education action.

Summary

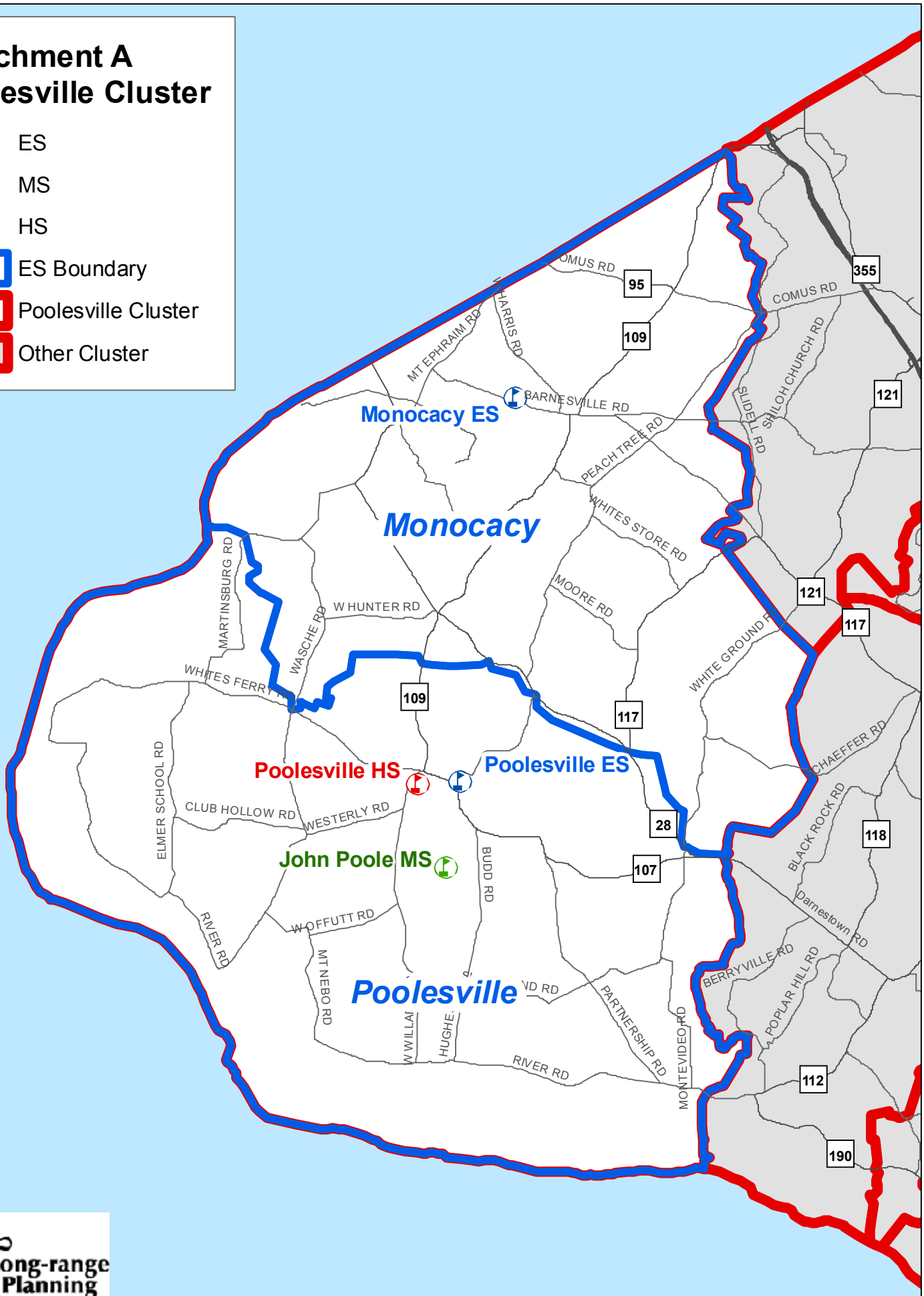
My recommendation to consolidate Monocacy Elementary School at Poolesville Elementary School has been made after careful consideration of all of the factors required by COMAR Chapter 13A regulations, and the Long-Range Educational Facilities Planning policy (FAA) and regulations (FAA-RA.) The procedures outlined in this recommendation will provide thorough notification of affected communities as well as input from these communities through the advisory committee and public comment processes.

Over the years Montgomery County Public Schools has provided the Poolesville cluster schools with considerable resources relative to enrollment levels. The years of transporting students from the Poolesville Elementary School service area to Monocacy Elementary School—to boost enrollment at the school—are one example. The opening of John Poole Middle School in 1997 enabled middle school students to have a facility of their own, despite enrollment levels much smaller than other middle schools in the county. The opening of the Global Ecology program at Poolesville High School in 2001, followed by the opening of the upcounty magnet programs at the school in 2006, enabled the high school to enroll more students. Clearly, MCPS has repeatedly demonstrated its' commitment to Poolesville cluster schools. That commitment continues with this recommendation.

The recommendation to close Monocacy Elementary School and consolidate its enrollment at Poolesville Elementary School is made after years of hoping that enrollment would turnaround. However, despite efforts to boost enrollment at the school—by transporting students from the Poolesville Elementary School service area—enrollment at Monocacy Elementary School has now declined to untenable levels. As I have outlined in this recommendation, Monocacy Elementary School's low enrollment negatively impacts the educational program while requiring unsustainable operating costs.

Attachment A
Poolesville Cluster

ES
MS
HS
ES Boundary
Poolesville Cluster
Other Cluster



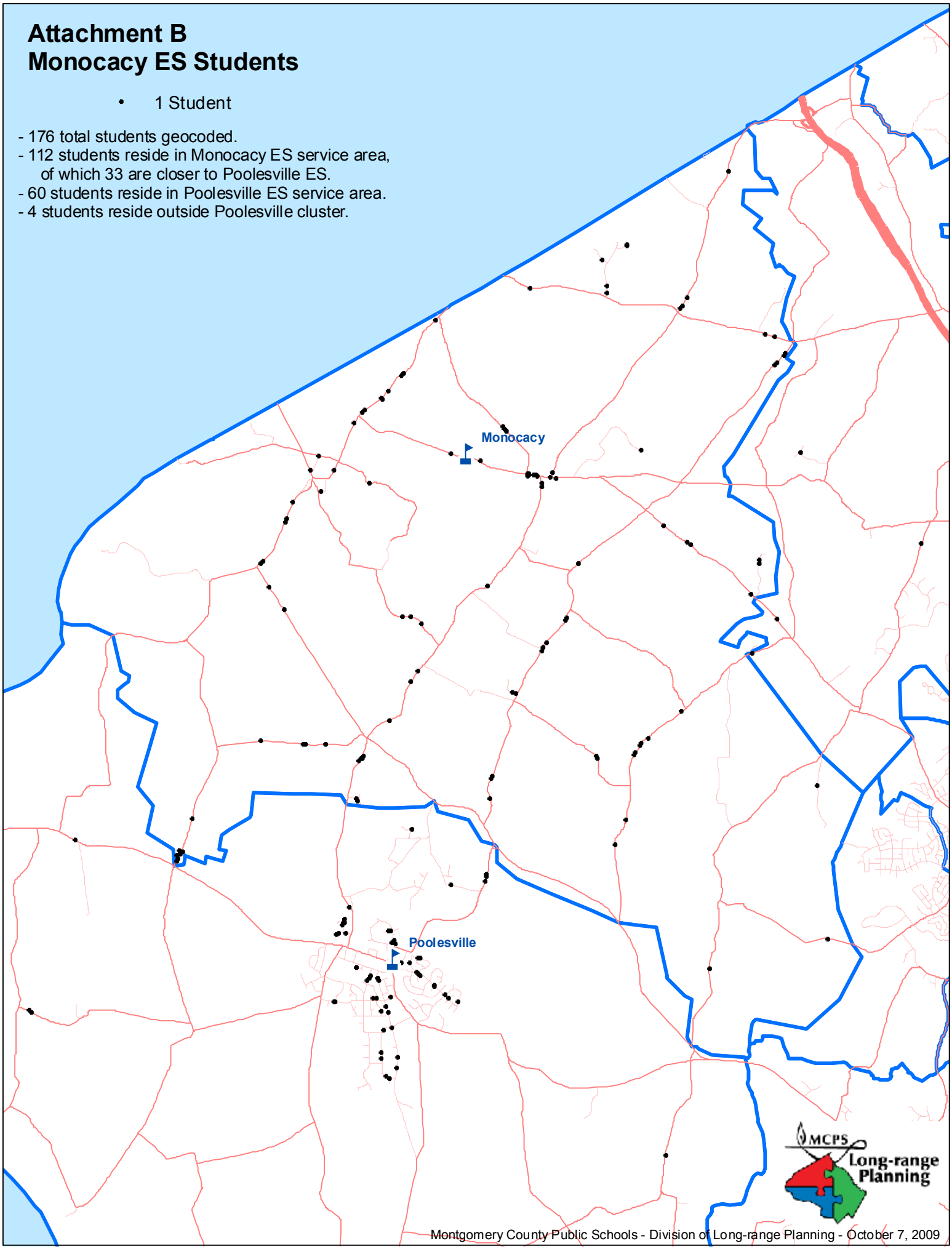
MCPS Long-range Planning

Montgomery County Public Schools - Division of Long-range Planning - October19, 2009

Attachment B
Monocacy ES Students

- 1 Student

- 176 total students geocoded.
- 112 students reside in Monocacy ES service area, of which 33 are closer to Poolesville ES.
- 60 students reside in Poolesville ES service area.
- 4 students reside outside Poolesville cluster.



Montgomery County Public Schools - Division of Long-range Planning - October 7, 2009