

Future of MontCo vocational high school uncertain

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<http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/local/md/Future-of-MontCo-vocational-high-school-uncertain-96692349.html#ixzz0raidCX00>

A federal grant sought by Montgomery County schools would allow for an overhaul of the district's vocational high school -- a move some parents worry will curtail options for the non-college-bound student.

The \$3.6 million Magnet Schools Assistance Program grant would affect three high schools, according to district officials.

Watkins Mill in Gaithersburg would likely become an International Baccalaureate magnet school focused on art and design. Silver Spring's Wheaton High would become either a technology magnet school or a "high-tech high" based on a similar setup in San Diego, Calif. And Thomas Edison, home of the district's vocational options but located near Wheaton, would likely become integrated with Wheaton, offering a International Baccalaureate career certificate.

Officials are considering spending some of the hoped-for money on extending the school day at Edison so students could attend their neighborhood school in the morning before heading to career training for the afternoon and early evening.

"We are trying to expand the options for students ... likely not to be as successful in a traditional high school setup," said Marty Creel, the district's director of enriched and innovative programs. "Our goal is to figure out what's working well and try to expand that."

But Creel's message isn't believed by some Edison parents who got wind this week of the proposal. They suspect the goal is to cut out the vocational options and push kids back into traditional high schools. "If Edison becomes a part of Wheaton, that's going to be a problem," said Laura Swerdlin, co-chairwoman of the county's Special Education Advisory Committee and the parent of a former Edison student. "The worry is they'll make it so high-tech that it will require higher-level courses at which these students won't be able to succeed." Swerdlin spoke for many parents long frustrated with what they perceive as Superintendent Jerry Weast's laser focus on college-bound students at the expense of those not able to or simply not interested in pursuing traditional higher education. "Our kids will be swept under the rug," Swerdlin said. At Wheaton, however, parents look to the overhaul as a net gain, said George Gadbois, a member of the PTA. "Edison is a critical component in the county's educational system, and incorporating it more into what's going on [at Wheaton] can only benefit both schools," he said. The school system has won the magnet schools grant twice in the past -- once for the creation of the Northeast Consortium schools, and once for the middle school magnet reform. Notification for this year's application will arrive by August, Creel said.

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