

**Written Testimony of
Laurie Augustino
On Behalf of the
Gaithersburg Cluster**

**Montgomery County Board of Education
November 10, 2010**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on behalf of the Gaithersburg cluster concerning the Superintendent's Recommended Fiscal Year 2012 Capital Budget and FY 2011-16 CIP. The Gaithersburg cluster's most important construction project, the replacement of Gaithersburg High School's building, is scheduled in the CIP. We support full implementation of the Recommendation as quickly as possible.

We also support the testimony of MCCPTA concerning the CIP.

Modernizing Gaithersburg High School

For years, you have heard the Gaithersburg cluster say that its number one CIP priority is the long-overdue replacement building for Gaithersburg High School. We are thrilled about all the progress made in the design of the new high school and we look forward to embarking on construction in the next fiscal year. We thank the many people on the Board, within MCPS, on the County Council and in the City of Gaithersburg who have listened to our pleas and are making the new Gaithersburg High School a priority.

The Future is NOW! Now is the time to allocate the funds for construction of the new Gaithersburg High School. Now is the time to take advantage of the down market and realize cost savings, by bidding this project as soon as possible.

The Future is NOW!

The future for Montgomery County Schools is not to hold classes in old, inferior buildings, but to house its student body in the most up-to-date facilities possible. It is therefore critical that the modernizations of our schools, particularly the next high schools on your modernization list: Gaithersburg, Wheaton and Seneca Valley, stay on track. These inferior school buildings are in school districts where MCPS faces some of its most challenging educational situations. These schools are among the highest in the county in percentage of minority students, of non-English proficient students, of high poverty students and of special education students. It makes it extremely difficult for MCPS to "raise the bar and close the gap" when it handicaps its neediest students with its most inadequate facilities.

Rising Enrollment

Enrollment is rising in the Gaithersburg cluster. Strawberry Knoll ES and Summit Hall ES are both above capacity and are projected to exceed capacity by more than four classrooms during the six-year planning horizon. Both Strawberry Knoll ES and Summit Hall ES are recommended for feasibility studies in the FY 2012 Capital Budget. I urge you to allocate the funds for facility planning at both of these schools in this years' CIP.

Enrollment is highly volatile in the cluster and we request that MCPS monitor enrollment closely. MCPS should account for the completion of construction of the condominium units on West Deer Park Road. These units will return additional students to Summit Hall ES, Forest Oak MS and Gaithersburg HS. Further, Laytonsville ES and Gaithersburg ES are both projected to exceed capacity during the six year planning horizon.

Systemic Replacements

Of the 10 schools in the Gaithersburg Cluster, only 3 schools are included among the 53 schools to be assessed for modernization in FY2011. Excluding Gaithersburg High School itself, that leaves the cluster with 6 schools that will not be modernized into the distant future.

4 of the 6 schools not appearing on the FACT list have seen more than 20 years of use since being built or last modernized. Do to the aging infrastructure in our cluster, we feel it is imperative that MCPS devote enough monetary funds for the systemic replacement and maintenance of the core building systems at these facilities and at all other aging facilities within MCPS. This includes increasing the HVAC to \$15 million and increasing PLAR by an additional \$1 million.

With such a large group of aging schools that will not be assessed, the Board's adoption of a detailed Renewal and Modernization Policy is a necessity. While the draft policy released by the Board is welcomed, it lacks any meaningful goals that can be used to guide MCPS's activities. Any policy that is adopted must contain specific targets for maintaining schools in good working condition. These targets should cover every major system component, and incorporate evaluation of the useful life of these systems. Asset replacement schedules should automatically be generated and funded based on these targets.

Other CIP Issues

There are additional issues that were presented to MCPS in June 2010. We do not see that these issues have been addressed in the FY2012 CIP. Since these are all considered

safety and security issues, we ask that they be addressed as soon as possible. The issues are as follows:

- Washington Grove ES has a security issue with the fence to their playground. There is a large hole or opening in the school playground fence that provides access to the school playground from the commercial business establishments on Oakmont Avenue. This opening becomes a security and safety issue for students and could be the potential for child abduction from the playground. We request that the repair of the opening in the playground fence receive a top priority in your recommendation.
- Washington Grove ES also has concerns about the appropriate maintenance of trees, bushes and undergrowth along the school fence that need to be addressed. The 12 white pine trees along the fence are there to provide screening of the playground and the commercial businesses. Some trees have died and need to be replaced. The rest of the trees and bushes and undergrowth need to be properly maintained for the safety and security of the students at Washington Grove ES.
- Summit Hall ES needs either a fence or additional security cameras in the back of the school building. Graffiti and broken windows are a regular occurrence at the back of the building, as the land backs to the woods and it is easy for vandals to go unseen. A fence will limit access to that area, and should limit the amount of vandalism. Security cameras will help catch the vandals when incidences occur.

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The monies allocated in the FY2011-2016 CIP are critical to moving MCPS forward. We are no longer talking about future additions and renovations. We are no longer talking about future maintenance projects. The future is NOW! Now is the time to allocate the funds to these projects so our students and staff can excel and succeed.

The Future is NOW!

Once again, I appreciate the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Gaithersburg cluster schools. Thank you.