

Watkins Mill Cluster

Watkins Mill High School.
Montgomery Village Middle School; Neelsville Middle School
South Lake Elementary School; Stedwick Elementary School; Watkins Mill Elementary School;
Whetstone Elementary School

FY2012 Capital Budget and Amendments to FY2011-2016 Capital Improvements Program

November 10, 2010

Testimony presented by:

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Good evening President O'Neill, Dr. Weast and members of the Board of Education. My name is Martha Crews and I am one of the Watkins Mill Cluster Coordinators. I am also the PTSA President at Watkins Mill High School.

On behalf of the families of the Watkins Mill Cluster, we'd like to offer our sincere thanks for addressing our cluster's major CIP needs. We are grateful that our school additions have been occurring on a timely basis.

And while we have been fortunate that many of our cluster's major capital needs have been addressed, or are being considered, we do have additional needs not currently in the CIP to be taken into account to ensure that our schools provide the safe and secure environment our children deserve for their education.

In regards to the current CIP:

We support the approved classroom addition at Whetstone Elementary School, with a goal of completing construction of the addition by August 2011.

The classroom addition is now well underway and scheduled to be completed this summer. We are all thrilled with the progress, although I have to share that my 10 year old daughter was dismayed when her favorite shade tree was cut down – and wanted me to use my PTA networks to resolve this. And my 7 year old son was upset about the loss of the playground and soccer field – albeit temporary – and he wanted to me talk to someone about it. Yes, there are some growing pains, but as I explained to my children, it will be well worth it in the end when portables which have been there for over 8 years are finally taken away and when staff won't have to teach small groups of children in the cubbies of hallways, but instead, will have rooms to teach in.

There are a few additional needs we'd like considered. The main part of the building is in great need of paint, and there is wiring on the outside of the walls which needs to be fixed.

Our HVAC system is “all or nothing” – the student classrooms are either too hot or too cold – with no middle ground. It’s hard to know how to dress our kids for their classrooms!

In addition, we support the recommended restroom renovations at South Lake Elementary School, Watkins Mill Elementary School and Watkins Mill High School.

Regarding Watkins Mill High School, we support the programmed School Based Wellness Center, a joint project between the Department of Health and Human Services and MCPS. This enhanced health room, with the varied health, social, and mental services it will provide, will be a tremendous asset to all students in our cluster, especially those who have little or no access to health care.

We greatly appreciate the new paint job and new roof on our school. They made our school sparkle and shine – a wonderful way to welcome our new principal! One building concern, however, is our outdated security camera systems; an upgrade is very important to the safety of our students, staff, and building.

We have some additional needs, not currently in the CIP, which we’d like considered:

At Montgomery Village Middle School, the most pressing concern is the condition of the athletic field. The uneven field is unsafe for our students, with construction debris and large rocks on or just under the surface. And this fall, MVMS had to use money from their school to pay MCPS for a recent repair. Other concerns include a leaky roof, restroom renovations, worn out carpet and broken floor tiles.

At Neelsville Middle School, we greatly appreciate the lovely gym floor that was provided to us this summer. To see the pride on the faces of our students when they saw the new gym floor was priceless. Thank you.

However, Neelsville is in need of exterior lights focused at the rear of the building, especially the isolated loading dock area, which has been vandalized many times. Other issues at Neelsville include problems with the 30 year old lockers, which have building services workers spending 40% of their time making repairs because parts for these antiquated lockers are hard to locate. We currently have 90 lockers that are not working and cannot be fixed. Several students have been injured and cut by pieces that have fallen off of their lockers.

Again, we have been fortunate that many of our cluster’s capital needs have been addressed, or are being considered. However, our friends and neighbors who attend Gaithersburg HS have not been quite so lucky. Therefore, in our collaborative, collegial spirit, we stand firmly beside the families of the Gaithersburg cluster as they ask that the modernization of Gaithersburg High School remains fully funded in the CIP and stays on schedule.

Furthermore, we support the positions of MCCPTA, as you've heard from President Kristin Tribble. Safe and secure school environments are vital to our children's education. We support keeping all planned additions and modernizations on track. Furthermore, we support countywide projects on HVAC, roof replacements, school security upgrades, PLAR and BMPI.

We welcome the draft Renewal and Modernization policy's recognition that a systemic approach for the replacement of building systems goes together with a modernization policy. However, we urge the board to establish meaningful goals to guide MCPS's activities, identifying specific targets for maintaining schools in good working condition as well as identifying the major system components that will be replaced on a periodic basis.

Thank you for considering our cluster's CIP concerns. However, we need your help primarily in the area of programming, and so we look forward to coming back in January, during the Operating Budget hearings, to once again – as I know you've heard us say before -- plead our case for an IB Middle Years Program and an expansion of our tremendously-successful IB Diploma Program.

Thank you.