

**Montgomery County Board of Education
FY 2012 Capital Budget and the
Amendments to the FY 2011-2016 Capital Improvements Program**

**Whitman Cluster
November 10, 2010**

Good evening President O'Neill, Members of the School Board and Dr. Weast.

I am Deborah Goldman, representing the Whitman Cluster. We appreciate this opportunity to testify on the Superintendent's Recommended FY 2012 Capital Budget and the Amendments to the FY 2011-2016 Capital Improvements Program.

We begin by thanking both the Board and MCPS for the excellent new Carderock Springs Elementary School. The school re-opened this fall to the excitement of students and staff alike. We appreciate the hard work, planning and consistent effort required to bring this school to completion.

Bradley Hills Elementary School is extraordinarily grateful for the Superintendent's recommendation for a FY 2012 appropriation to begin construction of the classroom addition, which is scheduled for completion in August 2013. We, and the Bradley Hills community, thank all of you and MCPS for working to make this badly needed addition a reality. Tonight, we ask that you support the funding needed to begin construction next year. The exponential enrollment growth at Bradley Hills in recent years, coupled with the further increase that will result from the Bethesda Elementary boundary shift, will place Bradley Hills at nearly TWO HUNDRED PERCENT of the school's original intended capacity. As a Cluster, we supported the boundary shift from Bethesda

Elementary School to Bradley Hills Elementary School because we believe firmly that straight articulation fosters community spirit and growth. Bradley Hills, however, is one of the oldest schools which has never been truly modernized, and has the smallest (or one of the smallest) APRs. This addition, necessary before the boundary shift, is now **essential**. Expansion of the core, including the APR, is critical not only to comply with fire safety codes, but also to provide the requisite functional space for 600 plus students. Given that the building must be closed and the students moved to a holding facility for one and a half years, this surely is the right time – and likely the **ONLY** time – in the even remotely foreseeable future to undertake this work.

Overcrowding has also become a serious problem at Wood Acres Elementary School. Enrollment is at 134% capacity, and Wood Acres currently has five portables. Projections for Wood Acres indicate that enrollment will continue to significantly exceed capacity. Because of the significant over-enrollment at Wood Acres, specialists in music, P.E., art, instrumental music, and ESOL are forced to share small rooms, use the cafeteria, and work on carts. The lunch period has been extended from 10:45 a.m. to 1:45 p.m., so as to safely fit all the students into the cafeteria.

Due to site and facility constraints at Wood Acres, the Superintendent has recommended that capacity studies be conducted to determine the feasibility of constructing classroom and core space additions at Wood Acres and also at nearby

Bannockburn Elementary School. The Whitman Cluster joins with Wood Acres, whose PTA will testify later this evening, in supporting the feasibility studies. We are hopeful that an addition at Wood Acres can accommodate its growing population.

Thomas W. Pyle Middle School has the highest enrollment of any middle school in the County. Thanks to the classroom addition completed in 2008, Pyle's classroom space is now adequate to meet its needs. However, because Pyle has just one gym, and approximately 180-210 students taking physical education each period, the space available for PE is not adequate. In order to reduce overcrowding in the gym and lessen the chance for injury, the P.E. teachers (staffing levels permitting) are forced to make use of other space in the building, such as the cafeteria when it is available. The lack of adequate indoor space is exacerbated on rainy days when the outside fields and basketball/tennis courts cannot be put to use. The overcrowding in the gym has led to some injuries, fortunately minor in nature so far, and has led to significant frustration on the part of the P.E. teachers because they cannot teach lessons suited for the students due to the space constraints. At this time, Pyle has the capacity to serve its student population with respect to classroom instruction; a second gym would enable Pyle to safely serve the same number of students when it comes to physical activity. In the interest of safety, we ask that you add whatever limited funding would be needed to this CIP to allow for planning and drawings for a new gym, so that funding for actual

construction could be included in next year's CIP.

Unlike many of the other elementary schools in our Cluster, Bannockburn Elementary School is not currently significantly over-capacity.¹ Since this past summer's restroom renovation, for which the children are really excited, (So Thank You Very Much!) the school, while old, is in decent shape and the community is content, involved and grateful.

With the ongoing feasibility study, however, MCPS is considering almost doubling the population at Bannockburn in one fell swoop. If MCPS decides to change Bannockburn's capacity from 366 to 685, we truly hope that this Board will ensure that any addition is well thought out. In particular, we hope you will ensure that there will be appropriate parking for staff and visitors, a drop-off lane in accordance with the Improved (Safe) Access to Schools, a cafeteria that will remain within fire code regulations without extending lunch beyond 2 1/2 hours, protection of Bannockburn's already limited playground space, and core space appropriate for a school of this magnitude.

Our concern about doubling the size of Bannockburn, without adequately preparing the school for such a large increase in students, is compounded by our concern about the modernization list detailed in Appendix R of the CIP. In particular, as we have previously testified here and in writing, we believe that the

¹ While there is some concern that its surrounding neighborhood could easily shift from older couples who have lived in the houses since the 1950s to young families with elementary school age children, as did the neighborhoods surrounding Bradley Hills and Wood Acres, its current population remains stable.

new list of schools to be modernized utilizes a nonsensical methodology that produces inequitable results.²

Appendix R creates a new list of schools to receive FACT assessments for modernization purposes. Any school built or "modernized"³ before 1986 is on the list. The list draws absolutely no distinction between a school built and a school supposedly modernized at the same time. We, however, firmly believe that FACT Assessments should differentiate between schools built and schools supposedly "modernized." In particular, a building BUILT in 1985 is far more likely to be in decent shape than one built in 1956 but supposedly "modernized" in the late 1980s or 1990, such as Bannockburn and Burning Tree Elementary Schools. It strains credulity to equate those buildings supposedly "modernized," but not actually re-built, to a brand-new school.

Therefore, we hope that you will press MCPS to explain why it draws no distinction between schools built before 1970 and supposedly modernized and those newly built. We believe that those schools originally built prior to 1970 should receive FACT assessments in this next round and should take priority (even for purposes of assessment) over schools that were originally built in the 1980s.

Finally, as we have in past years, we urge that you continue to address routine building maintenance. Although we recognize that this is also an operating

² This troubling combination could result in Bannockburn being strained to the breaking point for forty-some years.

³ We have placed the term modernized in quotes because in those days modernization meant renovation rather than a new building.

budget issue, we urge that you prioritize maintenance. Bathrooms, heating and air conditioning, playground blacktops, and lead in the pipes -- all of these problems need to be addressed, not just in our Cluster, but in the entire County. To optimize the learning process, every child needs to attend school in a safe, secure and modern facility.

We recognize your support of our schools' construction needs, and hope that you will take maximum advantage of the favorable construction market. We, in turn, pledge to continue working with you to ensure that our County and State legislators appropriate the funds necessary to make this CIP a reality.