

Poolesville Cluster ORAL Testimony
Capital Improvement Budget 2-8-11
Before the Montgomery County, County Council

My name is Jennifer Kasten, and as the Cluster Coordinator for the Poolesville Schools I appreciate the opportunity to come before you tonight to testify on the Capital Improvement Program. We thank you again for your past support in funding a budget that built a world-class magnet program at Poolesville High School, and providing the commitment to support that program with the needed resources, by building and opening the Science and Technology building in Fall 2009. I want to emphasize that it is a facility used by ALL students at the school and one that we believe will ultimately contribute to increased student participation in the sciences, and an increased participation in advanced science classes, as students experience learning in authentic science labs.

We also thank you for the opportunity to convene roundtable discussions addressing the superintendent's 2009 recommended closure of Monocacy Elementary School. The roundtable discussions were conducted in Spring 2010 with a report sent to the superintendent and Board of Education on June 16, 2010. On October 15, 2010, the superintendent released his recommendation to maintain Monocacy Elementary School as an operating school.

As a cluster we eagerly await the modernization of our high school, as well as the modernization of Poolesville Elementary School. We are pleased at the continued inclusion of PHS on the modernization schedule included in the Capital Improvement Plan; however, we are concerned that after more than a decade of inclusion on this list Poolesville High School still has no approved schedule data. Poolesville High School's approved schedule date is listed as TBD. Poolesville High School was built in 1953, with a renovation to add some classrooms, a gym and auditorium in 1978. Many of the materials (countertops, lab desks) were actually recycled from other schools trash from their modernization projects – the thinking at the time was that their trash was still an improvement. When Poolesville High School was first placed on the modernization list more than a decade ago, it was initially thought that modernization would be accomplished by 2010. As of today's date modernization is still unscheduled with an estimated date of 2021, at best, at which time the school will be approaching 70 years in age.

Poolesville Elementary School, built in 1961, is celebrating their 50th anniversary this year. At this time Poolesville Elementary School is not included on the modernization schedule; however, we are pleased to see the Capital Improvement Plan note that Poolesville Elementary School will be assessed for modernization. We strongly support the inclusion of Poolesville Elementary School on the list of schools to be assessed for modernization and look forward to the outcomes of this assessment estimated for availability in Fall 2011.

As a cluster we support the Board of Education efforts to balance MCPS construction priorities and place modernizations at the same or higher level of priority consideration with additions. Health and Safety issues in our facilities must continue

to receive the highest priority and we support the increase to HVAC projects to improve indoor air quality and recognize that it is significant. But in discussions regarding facility improvements, we have observed a real trend in MCPS and a culture of thinking that says additions are far easier to secure than modernizations. The only way to get attention it seems is to be overcapacity, which doesn't encourage smart planning. Schools in poor condition that do not exceed capacity have no priority until it becomes a health and safety issue, at which time band-aids are applied to remedy problems.

As a cluster we support the spirit of the recommendation of the January 2009 GA Audit report which recommends that MCPS periodically review the physical condition of its schools. We don't believe the intent was to have MCPS conduct FACT assessments for every school each year but rather to suggest they re-assess schools still waiting for modernization when a decade has passed, to consider how changes have affected the immediacy of their situation. A decade ago, PHS was a much smaller school so its ESA score (essentially student crowding and safety) offset the FACT score and placed it in the middle of its wave. Since that time our school enrollment has increased by 50% stressing our school in ways that were not present during the initial FACT assessment. We seek your support in urging MCPS to utilize monies funded in the proposed CIP to reevaluate the scores of schools who have experienced significant enrollment changes since their last assessment to ensure that modernization dollars continue to be directed to areas of greatest need.

We recognize too that in a time of limited resources that an easy fix might be to halt construction and modernization to save money in the short term. Please have the leadership and courage to see beyond the short term savings to the long term gains by looking at how much more we can accomplish in today's favorable construction market.

Thank you.