

Walter Johnson Cluster PTAs

Walter Johnson High School__North Bethesda Middle School__Tilden Middle School__Ashburton Elementary School__Farmland Elementary School__Garrett Park Elementary School__Kensington Parkwood Elementary School__Luxmanor Elementary School__Wyngate Elementary School

Testimony to the County Council on the Superintendent's Recommended FY 2010 Capital Budget and the Amended FY 2009-2014 CIP February 10, 2009

President Andrews, Vice-President Berliner and members of the Montgomery County Council. Liz Sadove, Deedee Jacobsohn and Jen Cope are the Walter Johnson Cluster Coordinators. We regret that we are unable to appear before you in person, but appreciate the opportunity to comment on the priorities of the Walter Johnson cluster of PTAs in what is a particularly tight budget year.

We recognize that you will need to make tough decisions this year concerning facilities improvements and that these decisions will be subject to increased scrutiny. It is for this reason that we support the Montgomery County Council of PTA's objective to ensure that MCPS focuses its CIP budget priorities on providing safe, secure, clean, healthy, and modern facilities.

Many of the Walter Johnson schools have benefitted from capital improvements in recent years. We appreciate the investments MCPS has made in modernizations and additions in our cluster and appreciate the support from the Board of Education and the County Council to address the long-standing overcrowded and antiquated condition of the school facilities in our cluster.

As you know, Walter Johnson HS is in the midst of the final phase of WJ's 13-year on-site modernization project. We are particularly grateful that the funding for completion of the modernization remains on track for completion by August 2010. It has been a long road, but with every completed phase, the community sincerely appreciates the growing pains. The state-of-the-art gym was opened just in time to host Homecoming dance in October—making the senior class most proud.

In addition, we were pleased that Ashburton ES's addition was completed on time for this academic school year. Although Luxmanor's addition was delayed, we appreciate that it has been fully funded and look forward to its completion in March 2009. We were pleased that funding was approved for the planning phase of Garrett Park ES's modernization. We hope that funds will be approved not only for the modernization of Garrett Park, but also for the planning and

construction of Garret Park's gym (both the gym and the modernization are scheduled for completion in January 2012). Planning for the modernization of Farmland ES is underway and the plans will reflect the latest student population projections which were greater than originally expected. We hope that the budget will approve funds for the modernization of Farmland ES (scheduled for completion in August 2011).

We were pleased to see that the CIP budget continues to recommend funding for modernizations at most of the remaining needy WJ cluster schools. Luxmanor ES's modernization is programmed (scheduled for completion in January 2018) and Tilden MS is programmed (scheduled for completion in August 2017).

While we are grateful that a feasibility study for an addition at Wyngate ES was approved for this fiscal year, we are deeply concerned that an addition still has not been programmed. Wyngate ES is currently 181 students over its capacity of 422 students; it now has 8 portables. Current projections show that Wyngate will be 271 students over capacity by 2013. We hope that the process for programming and approving an addition for Wyngate will be expedited so that the addition can be completed before the student population reaches these dramatic numbers.

In addition, we urge you to assess those schools that have not been assessed for the purposes of being added to the modernization list. As we have stated in the past, Rock Terrace, which is affiliated administratively with our cluster, was built in 1950, a decade before most of the schools currently on the list, but it does not yet have a FACT score.

While we are pleased that WJ cluster schools continue to be recommended for capital improvements in the amended FY 2009-2014 budget, we are concerned that revisions to the White Flint Sector Master Plan are recommending substantially more development and density in the Walter Johnson cluster area. The projected growth in student population has triggered planning for a new Walter Johnson cluster elementary school. We have been involved in this process, but to date are disappointed that the planning commission has not insisted that sufficient land be set aside within the planning sector for a new elementary school. We hope that an appropriate site within the White Flint sector plan can be identified to meet MCPS and MCCPTA standards for a safe, secure, clean, healthy, and modern facility.

Finding a suitable site for a new elementary school in the White Flint sector has been made more challenging because of the many parcels within the sector that

have already been approved for development without consideration for a school site. We believe that the County's planning process has been insufficient to accommodate the anticipated population growth and that it is imperative to consider potential demands on schools before approving housing that will ultimately necessitate school construction.

In addition, according to MCPS, the most recently released projections of student population at Tilden MS and Walter Johnson HS, will bring the schools almost to capacity by 2013. The student population projections that we have been given based on an additional 10,000 housing units in the White Flint Sector will exceed the capacity of both Tilden and Walter Johnson. We are concerned about the potential impact on these schools and request that the Council, BOE and MCPS engage actively in working together to ensure that the school system does not end up playing catch up for 20 years after the housing is developed.

We would like to highlight both our eager anticipation of upcoming modernizations and the completion of Walter Johnson HS's modernization project. In so doing, we would like to emphasize our expectation that MCPS exercise more planning and supervision during construction and commissioning of these buildings in order to prevent problems in newly opened buildings. There are several unfixed capital projects that are necessary to remedy problems directly resulting from construction projects.

Kensington Parkwood ES has had no end of problems that were created as a result of the modernization project. First, the creation of an enormous hill along the street by the lower entrance of the school continues to pose a safety hazard for children. KP ES needs their safe access plans re-configured due to problems created by the site changes (fill dumping) during construction. It has had problems with insufficient parking options and has requested an assessment to determine the possibilities of enlarging one or both of its parking lots, with particular attention to pedestrian safety. Second, the field behind the school has a serious drainage problem and it immediately floods with very little rain. The KP PTA had to raise tens of thousands of dollars to address this problem because the County would not. The fields remain unusable. Finally, KP ES's roof leaks every time it rains. As a result, we have requested the building be monitored for mold.

We urge that adequate construction money be allocated to health, safety, and commissioning issues in all the school projects slated for our cluster and that, as part of the initial construction budget, funds are also allocated to deal with the inevitable problems that arise as a result of construction. We recognize that budgets for these problems are tight, but MCPS should build in a buffer for these types of expenses so that, when, not if, problems arise, they can be fixed within the first 6 months of project completion, especially if safety

hazards are created. Not fixing these problems ends up costing the County more in the long-run.

Some of the Walter Johnson cluster schools that have successfully navigated the capital improvement modernization and/or addition odyssey remain at or over capacity. Again, we would like to emphasize our expectation that MCPS exercise more planning to attempt to accommodate the obvious development and growth in the cluster. The modernization cycle is an estimated 50-70 years. We expect that the modernizations will take into account the anticipated growth in the White Flint sector plan.

Most importantly, we urge you to keep the modernization schedule on track. Previous delays in the modernization schedule resulted in the illogical situation at Farmland and Garrett Park, whereby additions were completed just a few years before students are scheduled to transfer to holding schools while they are modernized. In addition, delays from years' past continue to ripple through the system, while our buildings continue to deteriorate, requiring costly expenditures on band-aid solutions. As several of our schools await modernization, the list of necessary capital improvements grows.

We were pleased to see funding for HVAC systems and the water compliance project. We agree that funding for these problems remain a priority. We appreciated that the first phase of Tilden MS's HVAC upgrade was completed this summer and are anxious for the completion next summer. HVAC problems have been a persistent issue in our cluster's older buildings. For example, Garrett Park ES has had consistent problems with heating and cooling in the building and the HVAC unit in the computer lab leaks and often creates air quality problems. The constant need for HVAC maintenance is a good example of the additional costs associated with postponing capital improvements.

We noted that certain other countywide capital projects, such as county-wide security systems and PLAR replacements, were not budgeted for. We feel very strongly that postponing PLAR replacements and small renovation projects exacerbates the need for capital projects and ultimately costs the County more in the long run. Tilden MS, for example, is not programmed for modernization until 2017, yet it desperately needs a new school-wide PA system, new lockers, repairs to broken tiles in the stairwells, painting, and reconditioning of its playing fields. The longer these repairs are postponed, the less healthy the school environment becomes, more damage is caused to other parts of the school, and ultimately the repairs are more extensive and more expensive to perform.

We also support additional funding to address security problems and other facility issues that present fire code violations or violate ADA requirements.

For example, Kensington Parkwood ES requests installation of extra lighting and fencing behind the school to discourage vandalism. Garrett Park ES does not have blinds in all the classrooms for code red drills. Tilden MS has an elevator that is non-functional and unsafe, as students, equipment and staff could become trapped. This requires maintenance to be ADA-compliant.

Thank you for your attention to our facility concerns and we look forward to working with you over the next fiscal year.