

# Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) 2009 Testimony

## Wheaton Cluster

Good evening, members of the County Council. My name is Grace Ibanez-Barnes and along with Chris Zawlocki we are here representing the parents that make up the PTAs of the Wheaton Cluster. Four years ago, Superintendent Weast and the Board of Education announced an ambitious initiative to try to catch up with the CIP needs of our cluster which had been delayed and neglected for several years. As a result of that initiative, students at Parkland Middle and Sargent Shriver Elementary and, to some degree, A. Mario Loiederman Middle enjoy new buildings and/or renovations that include modern, safe, and secure facilities conducive to learning that allow implementation of the special programs they offer. But we have other schools in the Wheaton cluster in desperate need of renovation. One example of that need is Wheaton High School.

**Wheaton High School (1954/1980-1982 last modernization)** was built in 1954 and had a two year renovation that was done from 1980 to 1982. At that time the building was gutted in its entirety except for the plumbing. It was also during this modernization that Thomas Edison High School of Technology was carved out of the existing Wheaton building.

If you would visit Wheaton High School and take some time to walk around the building and actually look at the facility, I would hope that you would see the truly poor condition of the building. Our students and staff must suffer with faulty HVAC systems, leaky roofs, dilapidated facilities, outdated science labs and building conditions that fail to meet modern standards.

The entire HVAC system is precarious and living on life support, so to speak. This distresses our computer labs. Computer labs on the school's third floor operate slowly in the incredibly hot classrooms in which they are used. Computer labs on the school's basement level must endure very cold temperatures, fall, winter, or spring. In the age of the diversification of information resources, students have become very accustomed to-and also dependent upon- access to the internet and several technological learning aids. This year's implementation of the Promethean Boards is a typical

example. Severe temperature changes are not conducive for learning and may eventually cause serious damage to this valuable equipment.

It is also obvious that capital improvement projects such as tuck-pointing and waterproofing have not been completed on a regular basis. There are concerns about indoor air quality possibly due to mold and mildew. This is suspected to be growing within the walls from moisture that is infiltrating the shell of the building due to mortar falling out of the walls around door and window frames that are rusted and that allow water to penetrate. Other concerns are the overall deterioration of concrete work, sidewalks, stairs, mortar and joints. Exterior and interior doors, old frames, hardware, and hinges are rusting and dilapidated as evidenced by the photographs that accompany this document. The lighting all over the school is old: old fixtures, frames, and yellowed light covers which are not eco-friendly.

The need for a better facility at Wheaton High School is extremely high. An incredibly diverse population, Wheaton High School's Racial/Ethnic Composition is: 24% African American, 12% Asian American, 11% Caucasian, and 54% Hispanic. Nearly 10% of our students are in Special Education programs, 16% are enrolled in ESOL, and 52% of our students apply for Free and Reduced Meals, the highest FARMS rate in Montgomery County Public Schools. At Wheaton High School, the high percentage of ESOL students, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and the bilingual nature of our multicultural community all contribute to increased need for academic support. The first step toward closing the achievement gap must be to offer our students the same opportunities to succeed that MCPS provides to students at other schools. Please do not allow our students to be ignored any longer. Propose a budget that instructs MCPS to proceed with the modernizations without delay. This is a question of equality and fairness.

We realize that renovation is a time-intensive project that may require years of work to complete. Our concerns extend past this current need and towards the future generations of Wheaton High School students and parents and to the community as a whole.

**Veirs Mill Elementary (1950/1991 modernization)** needs an addition to the current building. The school has 11 portable classrooms; more than 100 students attend classes in portables that are a safety concern and a maintenance problem. A new program was added to the school by the Central Office (PEP) prekindergarten special education program which expands every year. This extra project/program creates an additional strain on the facility. A proposal for the addition and feasibility study is scheduled for this school year and we hope is not postponed. Please, we cannot afford to fall behind on this project.

**Wheaton Woods Elementary (1952/1976 modernization)** is one the oldest buildings in the cluster and currently has five portable classrooms. We are requesting that the school be modernized. The portable classrooms cause security and maintenance concerns. Also, the playground area and equipment needs to be completely renovated. Please, we cannot afford to fall behind on this project.

**Loiederman Middle School (1956/2005 last modernization)** requests a feasibility study for a black box theatre/dance studio/storage space addition. Ideally, we would like an auditorium, but we feel that this addition would be a sufficient compromise to offer a quality performing arts program. This year the school is teaching 12 dance classes with a single dance studio. Six classes are currently being taught on the stage (at the end of the gym) which is a shared space with our physical education department.

**Harmony Hills Elementary & Brookhaven Elementary** are agreeable to delaying the completion date for their school addition projects for 6 months/1 year as long as the additional classrooms requested are included in their school addition projects. Both schools needed more classrooms to be added to the original project due to greater than anticipated enrollments. Harmony Hills Elementary currently has 8 portables and Brookhaven Elementary has 12.