

**Written Testimony of
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On Behalf of the
Gaithersburg Cluster**

**Montgomery County Board of Education
November 10, 2011**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on behalf of the Gaithersburg cluster concerning the Superintendent's Recommended Fiscal Year 2013 Capital Budget and FY 2013-18 CIP.

Foremost, I would like to thank you for your support of the new Gaithersburg High School. This is a huge project for the Gaithersburg cluster, and the construction is well under way.



The entire Gaithersburg community is excited to see this much-anticipated project move forward. We thank you for your past support for this project and we thank you for the continued funding in this CIP to move this project to completion. We know from our experience that the modernization was sorely needed by the time our turn in the modernization queue arrived. We therefore stand with the other “elephants” on the modernization list – particularly Wheaton/Edison and Seneca Valley – in opposing the recommendation to delay further the middle and high school modernizations. We cannot support a CIP that once again recommends delaying the long overdue modernizations of our high schools and middle schools. While it may be presented as delaying one high school or one middle school for only a year, these delays have ramifications down the line. Our school modernizations and additions are lined up like dominoes. If you push one, the others will also fall. Our deteriorating infrastructure cannot afford any more delays.

Other CIP Issues

In other years, the pressing need for the Gaithersburg High School modernization overshadowed the other CIP needs of the cluster. With the high school project under way (for which we again thank you), we are again able to turn our attention to the needs of the feeder schools in Gaithersburg. The following are current concerns within the Gaithersburg cluster:

Rising Enrollment

Enrollment increases are not limited to those clusters facing a potential moratorium. Enrollment is rising in the Gaithersburg cluster, too. Strawberry Knoll ES and Summit Hall ES are both above capacity and are projected to exceed capacity by more than four classrooms during the six-year planning horizon. Both Strawberry Knoll ES and Summit Hall ES were approved for feasibility studies in the FY 2012 Capital Budget. While we look forward to completing these feasibility studies this year, we request that these studies also address related limitations in the two schools.

At Strawberry Knoll ES, there is a major issue concerning the safe and secure access to the school. While the school has a “buzzer” system to allow entry into the building, the administrative offices are around a corner, with no window on the main entrance of the school. It is possible to buzz someone into the school and have them run off in another direction without going to the main office. This is not a secure situation for the school and its students. I would like to request that at the time the feasibility study is completed, that MCPS also includes a redesign of the administrative suite at the front of the school. This construction should be done in conjunction with their new addition.

Additionally, at Strawberry Knoll ES there are problems with leakage from skylights and the roof. Strawberry Knoll ES is a modular building with many skylights in its hallways. The majority of these skylights leak during rain. At times buckets must be placed in the middle of the hallways to catch rainwater, or the children may slip on the water as they move between classrooms.

Strawberry Knoll ES also has a unique HVAC issue. Due to the modular design and construction of the school, each room in the school has an independent HVAC unit. There are 117 units at the school and they are all out of warranty. It gets more and more difficult for building services to maintain these units as parts are becoming scarce. Also, because of this design, the hallways at the school do not have any heat or AC. During the winter months, the teachers try to leave their doors open to heat the hallways. During warm months, they try to keep their doors shut to conserve the cool air. This does not seem like the most efficient way to maintain the HVAC for a school. We hope that the project can also address the HVAC deficiency in the entire school.

At Summit Hall ES, the students and staff face several CIP challenges. Summit Hall ES currently has 8 portables on site. The “portable village” is a constant source of security concern to the school. The portables are located at the rear of the school in a secluded area. The area is not fully enclosed by fencing, and it is obvious that adults are going to the back of the school at night. School staff are constantly finding beer bottles, condoms, and other paraphernalia around the portables. Additionally, because the portables are easy to get to, people will routinely climb on them and access the school’s roof, causing

damage. Within the portables area, there is a blacktop area with basketball hoops. The first weekend after new backstops were installed, one was broken. If this area was appropriately fenced off, public access would be limited and destruction of property would be reduced.

A new portable, used for Special Education classes was added to SHES this year. This new unit was installed around the building, away from the other units. There is no “keyed” security door for this unit, and the teacher/class must walk around to the back of the building to enter. We request that this situation be solved by providing direct access to the new unit. There is an existing door to the building right out front of this new unit. This door needs to have “keyed” access to it to accommodate the location of this new unit, and provide a secure entrance to the school for the staff and students.

In addition, Summit Hall ES is scheduled for an addition sometime in the next 6 years. Further, in the new FACT assessments, Summit Hall was rated in one of the worse conditions among elementary schools, and the Superintendent’s Recommendation places it on the modernization list for 2021. With the issues noted at Summit Hall ES, it does not make fiscal sense to schedule an addition and then modernize the school a few years later. I would suggest moving Summit Hall ES up on the modernization list and taking care of the addition and modernization at the same time. It would cost less to do all of the construction at one time.

ADA Compliance

There has been construction going on around Gaithersburg Middle School this year in preparation for the new Archstone Development in the city of Gaithersburg. Through part of this construction, a new parking lot was created in the back of the school. This has highlighted a severe problem with ADA compliance at GMS. The back of the school has no handicap accessible paths to the rear doors of the school. There are 2 doors at the back of the school, and both exit onto a grassy hill with no easy way to move away from the building.



Some type of handicap accessible path needs to be added to the back of this school building for emergency egress. The first of the two pictures is an exit very near the elevator in the school, and it would be an ideal choice. Additionally, when the school’s new bus loop is completed next year, the majority of the parking for the school will be in

this back parking lot. If this door was fitted with a “keyed” entrance pad, staff could use this door as a way to enter the building in the morning without having to walk completely around the building.

Safe and Secure Access to Schools

Aside from the Strawberry Knoll issue mentioned earlier in my testimony, there are 2 other Safe Access to School concerns for the Gaithersburg cluster. The first, and most concerning is at Gaithersburg ES.

The city of Gaithersburg has a new apartment construction project called Archstone. As part of the plan for this development, Teachers Way was extended to connect Girard Street and Summit Avenue. This allows for another point of access to those living in the Archstone development. The Teachers Way extension brings the road within 15 feet of the building and fields at Gaithersburg ES. This is a two-lane road being added where no road existed before. We understand the need for the vehicular access to the apartment complex, but we ask that proactive measures be taken to assure that this new “cut through” is not being used at a high rate of speed.

This new road goes past the Gaithersburg Youth Center, Gaithersburg MS, and Gaithersburg ES. There are no other buildings on this road besides the apartment complex. We have asked the city of Gaithersburg to proactively install speed measures on this road before it opens. Whether it be speed humps, a circle at the entrance to Archstone, or even a stop sign at the Archstone entrance; some type of speed deterrent should be part of the road before it opens to the public. The response we are currently receiving is to wait until the road opens and then the City will test the road to determine if speed deterrents are necessary. We are asking the Board of Education to please send a letter to the city of Gaithersburg requesting a proactive approach to handling speed on Teachers Way before it is opened to the public. Our children will be walking on that road to get to school. We don’t need to wait for an accident on Teachers Way to be responsive.

Another safe access issue is at Laytonsville ES. Laytonsville ES frequently uses the all-purpose room after hours and in the evening. The outside door to the APR is accessed from the black top in the back of the school by the parking lot. The blacktop has no lighting on it at all. There needs to be some type of lighting on that corner of the blacktop to enable safe passage from the APR to the parking lot. It is frequently used by the public, and the lack of lighting makes it a hazard and unsafe.

Technology

The variability of technology throughout Montgomery County is pervasive. We see this most acutely in the Gaithersburg Cluster elementary schools, where the majority of our schools have no white board technology at all, or one board for the entire school. The lack of current technology hinders the ability to teach our students the new Curriculum 2.0 and continues to heighten the difference between schools in wealthier areas of the county and other areas. Not all schools have a parent base that can just buy something for the school whenever there is a need. MCPS needs to take on that responsibility. I ask that white board technology be allocated among all schools, so that every elementary school has at least one board per grade level.

Additionally, there is a specific technology issue at Forest Oak Middle School. During the last tech mod at FOMS, the population numbers were under estimated. Computers were removed from the school to accommodate for those numbers. Despite the estimates, the numbers are now higher, and the school does not have enough computers to do efficient Map R and Map M testing. We are requesting a mobile technology cart of @25 laptops to be used to fill the gap and allow the school to take the computers where they are needed at any time.

Air Quality

Going to school and not having it smell like sewage is an expectation. Unfortunately, whenever it is very humid and rainy, you can expect a sewage smell at Forest Oak MS. This stench can be smelled in the hallway by the administrative suite, the health room, and the cafeteria. This pervasive problem has been going on for over 7 years. Attempts have been made to fix it, with no luck. Gaithersburg MS has a sewage pipe in the building that has been invaded by root systems from the mature trees on the site. At least twice a year, for many years, the sewage system backs up. The solution has been to snake the system, but this does not take care of the problems. It continues to occur each year.

These two situations are good examples of where the maintenance history proves there has to be a capital solution to these problems. It shouldn't take over 7 years to "fix" a maintenance issue. There comes a time when a larger, more permanent solution must be found and applied. The cap on the vent pipe at FOMS must be replaced, and the sewer line at GMS must be replaced. Maintenance is no longer the solution.

Other CIP Issues

There are additional issues that do not fall into any specific category, but they need to be addressed. The issues are as follows:

- Forest Oak Middle School has a grading issue at the front entrance of the school. When it rains, the rain flows into the front entrance instead of away from the school.
- Goshen Elementary School now has 4 portables taking up a sizable portion of its blacktop. While there is a secondary black top at the site, the 2 are not connected, leaving a grassy muddy spot in between. We request that the blacktops be connected by laying asphalt on the patch between the two areas.
- During summer construction of the new parking lot at Gaithersburg MS, part of the existing basketball courts had to be used for the new lot. GMS used to have 4 basketball courts, now it is left with only 2. Please replace the 2 courts lost to construction.
- Rosemont ES has severe erosion on the path from the school to their playground and fields. This was due to poor construction grading and cleanup after the construction of their addition. As the ground erodes, buried construction metals and old asphalt continue to be revealed. This site needs to be re-graded and cleaned up.



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Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Gaithersburg cluster schools. As we discussed above, the capital needs of our schools are great. While we appreciate the economic restrictions that face this year's CIP, we must continue to allocate resources in the manner that best serves all of our children. I, and my fellow cluster coordinators in Gaithersburg are ready to work with MCPS to address the CIP needs described above. We look forward to working to improve the learning environment for our students.