

THE SHERWOOD CLUSTER CIP TESTIMONY

Comments on the Capital Improvements Program

On behalf of Sherwood Cluster Schools

November 14, 2011

Good evening members of the Board of Education. My name is Virginia Twombly. Tina Velazquez and I are the cluster coordinators for the Sherwood Cluster. We are here tonight to speak on behalf of the CIP needs of the eight schools in the Sherwood Cluster and to add our voices in support of the long-range foundational needs of MCPS. The Sherwood Cluster has been involved in the creation of the MCCPTA Resolution and certainly supports the testimonies you have already heard.

Last year at this time, our testimony implored the BOE to address the antiquated and inefficient systems that were negatively impacting students learning environments and costing the system exorbitant electric bills. It means a lot to the parents and community members to see how responsive and attentive this board of education is to the needs of our children. We are so grateful for the repairs and updates of the HVAC system at Belmont. Schools that took place over the summer as well as all of the other repairs, updates and conservations done over the summer at the other schools which have had an immediate positive impact on our students.

The modernization of Farquhar Middle School is the most significant and pressing concern of our community. Everyone is very grateful of and thankful for the support the Board of Education has given parents who have been concerned about relocating students during the planned modernization, by voting unanimously to support the land swap option. As you all know, the realities of geography would have meant a bus ride of up to an hour and a half each way for 11-14 year old children had the BOE not supported this land swap. Please remember that this modernization is not a luxury. It is not replacing Formica counters with marble; it is not a beautification effort with new paint and pretty decorations. This modernization replaces a school built in 1968 that has never been modernized. The facility suffers from asbestos, mold, crumbling walls and a piecemeal HVAC system that is inefficient and expensive to operate. The most efficient thing about Farquhar is the administration and staff, who work so hard in deteriorating conditions to meet all students' educational needs. The community is delighted that Belmont Elementary School is now on the list to be modernized.

As you know, Belmont Elementary School was designed with an inefficient, costly, antiquated "open space" concept. For those of you who have not had the opportunity to visit Belmont, the "open space" design called for school built without interior wall. This made teaching loud and disruptive and created major problems with proper ventilation and maintenance. Since 1974, attempts have been made to reconfigure the classroom space to maximize student learning however, the inherently flawed concept has resulted in a school that is in desperate need of modernization. We encourage the BOE and we will encourage the County Council to provide the funds to keep this modernization on schedule.

Brooke Grove Elementary School is struggling to maintain consistent temperatures and reasonable humidity levels in the school which negatively impact the learning environment for students and staff, and have caused numerous and expensive condensation and pipe leaks throughout the building. Despite numerous efforts to fix the existing systems, the fan coils and control units desperately need to be replaced. The entire HVAC system needs to be upgraded, which will have cost saving energy measures for the future. There are on-going roof leaks that have led to school damage and frequent repairs. The students and staff have had to deal with flooding, and mold and mildew which can very seriously impact anyone in the building who has a compromised immune system or asthma. Surely repairing on-going roof leaks and removing mold and mildew is not considered a “luxury”, even in difficult times.

Sherwood Elementary School has not yet received the HVAC updates on the system installed in 1977 – 34 years ago. It is an all-electric system and the school’s monthly bills have been as high as \$14,000 in the winter months. There are constant maintenance orders in to keep it going but the main facility really does need a new, energy efficient HVAC system. At a certain point, you have to ask yourselves, how many \$14,000 monthly PEPCO bills would it take to pay for a new system – not even counting the constant repair and maintenance bills?

Yes, the economy is sluggish right now which allows the school system to take advantage of the low interest rates and reduced construction costs that have already garnered savings for other CIP projects currently underway in the county. Delaying this modernization can only add costs to the project and negatively impact every other school waiting behind Farquhar on the list. The pace of middle school modernizations has already lagged behind the rate of both high school and elementary school modernizations.

The superintendent has put forth a list of recommendations that has been ordered by priorities. According to this list, technology has been listed lowest on the list yet has not seen impacts on its earlier proposed budget. Perhaps the BOE can find projects within this budget that, if necessarily delayed, will not jeopardize our educational facility needs and curriculum standards.

The Sherwood Cluster appreciates that you have an incredibly difficult task: to find the balance between the short-term and long-term concerns, to react to crises, and to meet the needs of the present without sacrificing the future. The CIP is all about the future. Regardless of what is going on today with continually fluctuating economic concerns and political winds that blow during election years, we cannot lose sight that if we do not plan for tomorrow, when tomorrow comes, as it surely will, difficulties will be all the more greater.

We very much appreciate your giving us the opportunity to speak on behalf of our schools tonight. Thank you for your time and your consideration.

Respectfully,
Sherwood Cluster Co-Coordinator
Tina Velazquez and Virginia Twombly