

**Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster**  
**Bethesda-Chevy Chase HS \* Westland MS \* Bethesda ES**  
**Chevy Chase ES \* North Chevy Chase ES \* Rock Creek Forest ES**  
**Rosemary Hills PS \* Somerset ES \* Westbrook ES**

**Testimony Before the Montgomery County Council**  
**FY 2013 Capital Budget and the**  
**FY 2013-2018 Capital Improvements Program**  
November 10, 2011

Good evening Superintendent Starr, President Barclay, Members of the Board, I am Craig Brown, and along with Mary Cobbett and Lynn King, we represent the Bethesda-Chevy Chase cluster.

Exactly one year ago, I was in front of you on many of the same issues that I am speaking about tonight.

This night, I will talk about our 'shovel-ready' projects first. Then I plan to use the remainder of the time to discuss the boundary changes and B-CC Middle School #2. Ultimately, what we are asking for is clarity, consistency, and a true commitment to a process we can all stand by and support. We are also looking for you Dr. Starr, and this Board to be bold, to be inspiring, and to show leadership to our community and to the County Council. And most importantly: No More Surprises.

First, this new 6-year CIP budget represents a significant commitment to invest in the B-CC Cluster schools. We thank the Board for these recommendations. We are also grateful for the activities already in flight at Westbrook Elementary and at North Chevy Chase. Moreover, we cannot emphasize enough the importance to continue to make progress on the Modernization of Rock Creek Forest Elementary. This project has become a lynch pin project for other capacity issues we have in our cluster and this

project must remain on-track. This school houses many of our children who are most in need, and for too long, this facility has been in the absolute poorest condition of any in our Cluster. This modernization represents a commitment by the School Board and County to our Cluster's greatest current facility need and we cannot state more strongly that this project must stay on track.

Rosemary Hills Primary, Bethesda, and North Chevy Chase Elementary Schools are all slated for additions in this CIP. We are already hearing that the North Chevy Chase additions will be limited to only 6 classrooms. Given that growth projections in our Cluster tend to underestimate our true growth, we are recommending that 8 classrooms be planned for North Chevy Chase. Moreover, we strongly recommend that we be a bit bolder and have more aggressive capacity plans for Bethesda and Rosemary Hills. Let's learn from other projects in the County and not have to move portables into facilities immediately after spending tax dollars to increase permanent school capacity.

### **Westland Middle School**

At our only Middle School, we are suffering from athletic fields that are in disrepair. Bare dirt and rock outcroppings are causing concern for the safety of our children. We ask that MCPS look to improve the condition of Westland's fields.

### **B-CC High School**

Next, I need to spend a moment on what we consider our

largest issue on the horizon: Significant capacity deficit at our High School.

B-CC has a capacity just over 1600. Shortly, projections (which tend to be underestimated) have our High School at an enrollment of over 2100. The need to make significant increases in capacity at a school that sits on one of the smallest high school properties in the County will not be easy. This project will be complicated and must be addressed in short order. This issue is as big as any other issue we have in our Cluster. Let's not wait until it is too late. Let's act now and get working on our game plan for B-CC high school.

### **Enrollment Challenges**

Last year, we requested that a full review been performed on all student flows through the elementary, middle and high schools. Has there been an examination of the Change of School Assignment Process, and all other mechanisms that could potentially increase the overall student population throughout the Cluster? What progress has been made to address the COSA process managed by Mr. Whigham's office? Our research has only uncovered public documents from a meeting held last March, but we have not been informed specifically how the COSA process takes into consideration the strain it places on Clusters that are seriously out of capacity. We are asking for more transparency, clarity and consistency around this process. There are more anecdotal examples of transfers and exceptions that make us question the consistency of the process and ambiguity of the rules

applied for accepting transfers. For any MCPS Cluster where there is clearly a capacity deficit, we need to make certain that the transfer policies place heavy weight on the simple fact if there is no space, it is problematic to support additional transfers.

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Now, I would like to address the boundary changes and the second Middle School.

As mentioned last year, the Cluster recognizes and appreciates all of the hard work MCPS has done to focus time and attention on our Cluster's myriad of challenges. The issues that we have been facing have been building up for years, and this level of activity should have begun a number of years ago. Regardless, we now need to proceed in a manner that is thoughtful, comprehensive, and with the full representation of all of our schools.

This has been a long process, and unfortunately, there have been numerous surprises that have caught our Cluster off guard.

1. We were surprised when the autism and pre-k programs have been recommended to be moved out of Rosemary Hills into Rock Creek Forest. No program changes were discussed during the boundary study process, nor was the Rock Creek Forest community even involved in the boundary study process that has ultimately led to this change.
2. We were surprised when we heard that Westland MS is now being considered to be a relief valve for overcrowding at Pyle MS in the Whitman Cluster. This

was never presented during any part of the year-long activity surrounding the second middle school.

3. We were surprised when less than 1 week after the CIP was released listing the Rock Creek Hills Park property was going to be the site of our second middle school, that now, we are going to reset the site selection process, but somehow keep this project on track.

We ask that some commitment be made to reduce the number of surprises coming out of this process. We are an actively engaged PTA body and we are ready and willing to deal with tough choices. We gratefully ask to be included earlier in the process on some of these very important issues and changes.

### **The Elementary Boundary Recommendations**

As a Cluster we agree with the recommendation made by MCPS, and we are in support of recommendation number 5. This recommendation allows for more straightforward articulation patterns, keeps more children in the same school from K-5, and maintains our desire to have diversity across our Cluster.

We strongly believe that all of our Cluster schools offer a top-notch education, and for those families moving to any of the four impacted schools, we are certain that they will continue to have a great elementary education experience.

Lastly, by completing this boundary study, this reinforces further the commitment by MCPS to keep our Cluster boundary intact. We as a Cluster strongly want to maintain

the richness in diversity and we have been able to maintain it.

## **The Middle School #2 Recommendation**

Regarding the Middle School, I would like to call out why we have this need for a second Middle School. We continue to have 2 elementary schools that act as a Middle School for over 200 6<sup>th</sup> graders. Moreover, our growth projections at Westland Middle School leave us in the situation that we need to add significant middle school capacity to avoid moving into a County-mandated building moratorium.

Therefore, we ask for a second middle school to be built within the B-CC Cluster by the promised timeline of August of 2017. I must reemphasize the fact that this Cluster and Montgomery County require additional school capacity and this project will be an important component to rectify the significant deficit we currently face.

Now. The more challenging part. How are we actually going to really get a school by 2017? We have heard that Parks and Planning will not give up park land. Two communities have strongly voiced opposition in leveraging park land for school facilities and playing fields. Our Cluster has no 'sector plan' that can allocate space for a school. Because of all of these factors, we are in a tough situation that seems to have no remedy. The only MCPS-owned properties available in our Cluster are nowhere near the size needed for a Middle School.

Where will the compromise come from? What if there is no compromise? We have already seen in this CIP, the plan to move children from the Whitman Cluster into Westland MS. Will the plan be to move children from the B-CC Cluster into the Walter Johnson or Downcounty Consortium? Will this happen if we do not find a site? We hear conflicting messages. One one hand, we hear from MCPS, “we do not want to change the boundary.” However; we see indications of changing the Middle School articulation patterns for Westland well in advance of our Middle School site even being secured. Again. Please. No more surprises.

Dr. Starr and Members of the Board, are you going to assure us that all of our children will remain in our Cluster? Should we be preparing for another surprise down the road? If there is no compromise between communities, Parks and Planning, the Council, and no parkland is available for a school, what will be the next option? Will we have to face a hard reality? If there is no compromise, there will be no second middle school. There has to be some compromise. We ask members of the Board, the Superintendent, Parks and Planning, the Council to please work together and solve this issue.

We appreciate the plan that was released just this week, and we welcome the opportunity to participate in a second site selection process. But we also recognize that ultimately, the decision is not in the hands of the Committee but with the Superintendent. The School Board. Our elected County officials. We must have

compromise.

The County overall has a student population exploding at a rate of around 2000 students annually. We need facilities to support this growth. We do not want to see articulation patterns or boundary changes implemented. I do believe that is most likely the one compromise we all do not want to have to make.

Second, I would like to ask Dr. Starr and the Board to help us navigate all of the fear and concern that exists in our Cluster about this second middle school. Beyond the issue of location, our community is concerned about program parity as well as maintaining diversity. There is significant worry, which then breeds a lack of support for a new school due to fear of program inequality and an east/west divide in our Cluster. We ask you Dr. Starr and the Board to allay these fears. Be bold. Commit. Get out there and assure our our community that we will maintain diversity and support a world-class program at our new middle school. By not doing this just continues to draw out fear and worry. Do not underestimate how interconnected this concern is with the site selection process. In the eyes of our community, the elementary school boundary changes, the middle school site, it's ultimate boundary, and program parity are all interlinked. Because our community does not look at these components in isolation, we ask you to not as well. We need your help.

## **Recognition of the Local PTAs**

I would like to recognize the hard work our parent PTAs

have done to help support the process. From representing all of our schools during the Middle School site selection, where every single one of our schools was represented, to the elementary school Boundary Study, to the feasibility studies being performed at Rock Creek, North Chevy Chase, and the facility design at Westbrook. Parent volunteers have followed the process, worked in tandem with MCPS representatives as well as with the County Council offices to thoughtfully work through, in a disciplined manner all of the challenges we have in our Cluster.

Since the elementary boundary study and Site Selection Committee decisions came down from MCPS a year ago, dozens of our local PTA members, parent volunteers, moms and dads, have put in significant time and commitment to the process that was laid out in front of us. In our Cluster, we have surveyed our school communities, written letters, held numerous cross-cluster meetings, and have reached out to our school communities to obtain feedback on all of these challenging issues. I would like to thank all of those volunteers for their hard work and commitment.

This has been a challenging year; some of our PTA leaders have been personally attacked during this process. The moms and dads who volunteer to try and support their kids and schools do not deserve that. This process has been so fraught with animosity it has created this bitter atmosphere that has pitted one neighbor against another. We look to our elected officials to help change the tenor of the conversation, to better educate the

communities, both inside and outside of the schools, so that our PTA parents are not on the firing line for issues that really should be supported by our County services. After all, we are simply trying to make certain we have our children in the best facilities possible to learn.

Dr. Starr, we appreciate your recognition of the challenges that have strained the PTA body throughout the last year. We are a committed organization and will continue to advocate for what's best for our children and school system.

Thank you.

*B-CC Cluster Capital Improvements Program (CIP) Needs  
MCPS FY2011 November 10, 2011*

B-CC Cluster Comments to the Superintendent's Recommended FY 2013-2018 Capital  
Budget and Capital Improvements Program (CIP)

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*A. Request for Individual Projects:*

**Boundary Study:**

We are in support of option number 5. We would like to indicate that the Cluster has supportive of the efforts to update the boundaries for Chevy Chase, N. Chevy Chase, Bethesda, and Rosemary Hills Primary and Elementary Schools. This process has been challenging, and we do want to voice our request to make certain that all voices are adequately represented throughout the process, and that our Cluster maintains its diversity throughout the cluster, from Primary through Middle and High School. The Cluster has historically valued its ability to be very inclusive for all students throughout the Cluster, and we want to continue to make certain that all decisions are made with that in mind.

**Additions:**

Overall, we are looking forward to actively participate in the actions outlined by the Board in the CIP.

a) **Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School Addition Feasibility:**

Funds need to be provided for the feasibility study for additional classroom space at B-CC High School. Due to our increased enrollment, we are falling short of specialized space as well as standard classroom space in the High School.

b) **Westbrook and North Chevy Chase Additions:**

We are in support of the CIP's recommendation to complete the gymnasiums and additional classroom space at these two elementary schools. Due to building moratorium concerns as well as fact that both schools are grossly over capacity, we are requesting that these two projects stay on track as planned in this CIP.

**Modernizations**

We applaud MCPS' efforts to work with the County Council to maintain the progress of modernizations throughout the system. We have one modernization in the queue, Rock Creek Forest, and continue to advocate for its completion.

a) **Rock Creek Forest Elementary School Modernization:**

The Council and School Board have committed to completing this project, not only

because the school is in desperate need of modernization, but to alleviate the overcrowding in the Cluster. This modernization will bring a significant number of additional classrooms and must not be delayed. The commitment has been made, the feasibility study has been completed, and we fully expect this project to stay on track. It must be deemed a high-priority by MCPS.

Built in 1950 and has not been renovated since 1971, we welcome the Board's recommendation to program funding to complete the plans to fully modernize the facility. Rock Creek Forest has been, and continues to greatly exceed its enrollment capacity, and is apparent within the facility and in its six portable classrooms. Due in part to the popular Spanish Immersion program, class size reduction initiatives, and an increase in first grade enrollment, deficit capacity is projected to double by the end of the decade. The deteriorating conditions of core facilities, including; electrical, plumbing, safety, and classroom fixtures, have created a sub-par learning environment for its students. We urge the Board to make certain modernization begins in 2013.

**Rationale:** The core facility does not meet the fundamental safety needs of its students, does not have adequate sized common areas, hosts a crumbling core infrastructure, an inadequate number of classrooms for its students in regular and special education classes, has unsafe and inadequate front and rear entrances, and a poorly lighted, undersized parking lot for its faculty.

### **3. New Schools**

The B-CC Cluster is in support of a second middle school, and we support MCPS's effort to add additional Middle School classroom capacity in our cluster. Enrollment projections place Westland MS significantly over capacity in only a few years. This project must be fast-tracked and move ahead without delay.

### **4. Core/Signature School Improvements**

The B-CC Cluster does not wish to offer any comments in this category at this time.

## **B. Request for County-wide Projects:**

### **1. ADA Compliance**

a) **None**

b) **Rosemary Hills PS ADA Compliance:**

**Rationale:** The RHPS facility is not fully equipped for students with disabilities. We serve autistic students and feel that we are lacking in our readiness for them and for students who use wheelchairs. Our facility does not have ramps to our 2nd grade corridor that leads to classrooms and our portable quad; and many of our bathrooms are not equipped to handle wheelchairs. We either need to remove the four steps and create a ramp in the 2nd grade corridor OR add a ramp on the side of the steps.

## **2. Asbestos Abatement**

The B-CC Cluster does not wish to offer any comments in this category at this time.

## **Building Modifications and Program Improvements**

a) **None:**

### **Fire Safety Code Upgrades**

a) **None at this time**

## **5. Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Replacement**

This project provides for the orderly replacement of heating, ventilating, air conditioning, control, and plumbing systems in facilities that are not on the modernization schedule.

a) **Air conditioning or better ventilation of school gymnasiums:**

**Rationale:** Conditions at school gymnasiums, which are heavily used year-round by both the school and the surrounding community, render the facilities unhealthy and unsafe during many of the warmer months. While we are aware that the exorbitant capital and operating costs do not now allow for air conditioning of school gyms, we believe they should be better ventilated with effective, working ceiling fans so that they can be used for PE classes, daycare programs, and community groups for the entire 10-month school year. In addition, a down-county shortage of community centers (and a lack of gyms at two B-CC Cluster elementary schools) makes it crucial that the gyms be used to their fullest capacity.

At RHPS and RCFES, our large student body and our smaller All-Purpose rooms, we often have to use our gyms for our larger functions. Our gym is extremely uncomfortable at the beginning and end months of the school year. The temperature is many degrees higher than the rest of the buildings, even in the morning, of warm days. This makes it hard for kids to exercise as much as they might, and makes them sleepier for the rest of the day. Additionally, it warms up the nearby classrooms just from heat escaping through the closed doors. Also, in our capacity as a community school, we are unable to serve our community well in the warmer months. We recommend installing air conditioning at RHPS at the earliest possibility. At a minimum, we request that large capacity fans be installed in the Gyms. They should be mounted high on the walls to provide proper ventilation and some cooling. The temperature at times is 10-15 degrees higher INSIDE the gym than outside the actual facility.

## **6. Improved (Safe) Access for Schools**

a) **Improvement of the playing fields at B-CC High School:**

**Rationale:**

B-CC HS would like to state that is not formally requesting an upgrade to its playing field, but this is due to the economic situation we are currently in. B-CC HS still lacks green space and playing fields in the congested, down-county area is a major problem and is particularly acute at B-CC HS, the smallest high school site in MCPS, which is situated on 16 acres (14 acres fewer than the county standard of 30 acres per high school). With a full panoply of field sports, and with most teams having varsity and junior varsity boys and girls teams, B-CC HS fields 8 teams in the fall which require daily outdoor practices and play all home games on the single stadium field. In the spring, there is a single baseball diamond that can't support four teams for practices and games. As a result the majority of practices and all softball games are held off site. To preserve the playability of the stadium field, neither of the four other outdoor teams or any of the other spring teams can use it for practice. Because buses are not available for practices, students must drive to a variety of practice sites, which adds to the congestion in the area and places far too many inexperienced teen drivers to our roads. The single field cannot be used for required physical education classes, so instructional delivery is negatively impacted as many classes are held indoors in oversized classes of 40 or more students.

We understand that MCPS is considering turf fields at other schools. In the event that MCPS cannot immediately provide turf for this field, we request that MCPS allocate enough funds to maintain the field properly to provide a safe and less fragile playing surface.

**b) Improvement of the playing fields at Somerset ES:**

**Rationale:**

Rationale: Despite recent resodding, about half of the field at Somerset ES is dirt, the grass having been worn away in less than two years, even with reseeding and extensive watering this past summer. When the field is dry, there is a tremendous amount of dust swirling around as the students play on the field. In addition, with the top soil now worn away, small rocks and pebbles are coming to the surface again which makes the field slippery and dangerous to run on. Recreational and school fields continue to be in short supply in the down-county area, so it is essential that the fields that do exist be kept in reasonable, safe condition.

We continue to be concerned, since the field at Somerset is one of the smallest in the county, that the wear and tear of students using the field daily during school for PE and recess, along with after school and weekend use, that replacing the sod will be a very temporary solution, lasting less than two years. An alternative sod could yield a lifespan of 10-15 years, negating the necessity for replacing the sod every eighteen to twenty-four months.

**c) Improvement of the playing field at Westbrook ES:**

**Rationale:** As a result of substantial hillside erosion, rain water flows heavily onto our playing field. A pooling effect then occurs on our field preventing the water to drain properly. After any heavy rain in our area, our playing field can not be used by students during recess or physical education due to substantial amounts of pooled water and very poor water drainage. Moreover rock outcroppings are causing this field to be a hazard for the students.

**d) Improvement of the playing field at Bethesda ES:**

**Rationale:** The grassy area of the Bethesda ES field is a clay like surface covered with a mix of weeds and grass. Our field is heavily used by the community, which has resulted in uneven areas throughout the field; dips in the surface and patches of weeds where grass used to be. Due to the heavy traffic on the field, the top soil is now worn away and small rocks, pebbles, pieces of glass and brick like material come to the surface. Bethesda ES is an inclusion model school and has students with mobility restrictions requiring them to use walkers and/or wheelchairs; this uneven surface makes it difficult to maneuver wheelchairs and walkers across the field.

Although the field was resurfaced (topsoil added and sod) approximately five years ago to address the uneven patches of grass and the surfacing of debris, we are faced with the same issues once again. With the heavy use of the field by the school and the community, replacing the sod with artificial turf will extend the life of the field and help support our need to make the field more accessible for students with mobility challenges.

**e) Improvement of the playing field at Westland MS:**

**The current condition of Westland's fields is simply dangerous. Not only are there random holes but large rocks litter the field. Over one thousand children play on the fields each day during physical education classes and athletic events. The fields are also used outside the school hours by a large number of groups. Their constant use hinders any efforts to improve the safety and overall quality of the fields. Please consider our children's safety and renovate the fields at Westland Middle School.**

**7. Planned Life-Cycle Asset Replacement (PLAR)**

This project includes repair or replacement of building systems, exterior resurfacing, interior partitions, doors, lighting, windows, security gates, bleachers, communication systems, and flooring.

- a) Rock Creek Forest ES Funds need to be included for Rock Creek Forest ES to maintain an adequate environment for our children.

**Rationale:** Rock Creek Forest ES is not scheduled for modernization until January 2015 (when it will be 65 years old) and it will have been more than three decades since the school's last renovation in 1971. Thirty to sixty year-old systems are bound to need maintenance or replacement.

**b) Rosemary Hills funds need to be included for Parking.**

**Rationale:** The parking situation at RHPS is already over capacity. This situation is only exacerbated with the larger portable in our parking lot. County assistance with a solution is needed.

**c) Bethesda ES Parking Needs**

**Rationale:** Bethesda ES is over enrolled by 135 students, which means increased staffing and increased number of families. These changes in enrollment and the location of the school in downtown Bethesda with no street parking puts a strain on the Bethesda ES parking lot. County assistance is needed to address this issue of limited parking for staff and families.

**8. Relocatable Classrooms**

a) There is a need for funding for heavier duty relocatable classrooms (previously referred to as “temporary classrooms”). Since units are being used longer, and being installed more frequently, we must improve the quality of these relocatables, they are in very poor condition and are inadequate learning spaces.

**9. Restroom Renovations**

a) Rosemary Hills PS requests to be added to the bathroom renovation schedule.

**Rationale:** Rosemary Hill PS understands that the cluster is renovating bathrooms that have not been updated since 1985, however, RHPS (renovated in 1988) is in need of better bathrooms and ones that are ADA compliant. Our bathrooms receive heavy (and inexperienced!) use. We request that RHPS be added to the list of elementary schools in need of bathroom renovations, especially to ensure that we in compliance with ADA regulations.

**b) Additions needed to ES bathroom renovation scheduled for 2016**

**Rationale:** Bethesda ES needs to add a ventilation system to move the air in the bathrooms to decrease the unpleasant odor. In addition, the handicap stalls need to be widened to accommodate both an individual in a wheelchair and his/her assistant, who assists with toileting. Moreover, Bethesda ES needs more than one stall with a handrail.

**c) Westbrook Elementary School is on the schedule for bathroom renovations.**

**Rationale:** We understand that Westbrook Elementary School is on the list of schools to receive updated bathrooms in the 2014-15 school year. With the growth of the school, the existing bathrooms, both adult and children facilities, get much greater usage resulting in greater breakdowns and necessary repairs. We recommend that MCPS take advantage of the efficiencies of scale by completing these renovations concurrent with the school expansion.

## **10. Roof Replacement**

none

## **11. School Gymnasiums**

a) Construction of gyms at North Chevy Chase ES and Westbrook ES must remain on-track.

**Rationale:** The BOE and the Superintendent continue to believe that elementary gymnasiums are essential for the physical education program and well being of students and that these facilities should be included in all Montgomery County Public Schools. Because recreational and school fields continue to be in short supply throughout the entire down-county area, these gyms should be given high priority. The all-purpose room continues to be the only place for EVERYTHING in these schools and, on rainy days, indoor recess wrecks havoc on the building, the children, the staff and the faculty, food services, and the teaching day! All elementary schools should have gyms, and we strongly agree with the recommendation to move forward with the gymnasiums.

The need is particularly acute at Westbrook ES, due to overcrowding – the school is 46% above capacity or 124 students over the school's capacity – and at North Chevy Chase ES, which houses the only sixth-graders, countywide, who lack access to a school gym. Because this factor was not considered, North Chevy Chase ES was ranked #20 of 25 schools and is not scheduled to get a gymnasium until August 2012. The need for a gym is also becoming increasingly acute as other facilities are being over-used. Both gym projects have already been approved.

## **12. School Security Systems**

a) **None**

## **13. Technology Modernization**

The B-CC Cluster does not wish to offer any comments in this category at this time.

## **14. (Water and) Indoor Air Quality**

Improvement of water quality/lead remediation is a concern for several of the B-CC Cluster schools. On June 6, 2005, we received notice from the MCPS Environmental Safety Coordinator (Lynne Zarate) advising that testing has been completed and remediation is not needed at Chevy Chase ES, North Chevy Chase ES, Westbrook ES, Somerset ES, and Westland MS (though earlier testing indicated elevated lead content at Westland MS). However, B-CC HS, Bethesda ES, and Rock Creek Forest ES have not yet been cleared.

Poor air circulation persists at Westland MS, especially on the second floor of the building where air pockets continue to need regulation.

**C. Other:** FY 2010 Capital Budget and Amendments to the FY 2009–2014 Capital Improvements Program (CIP)