

Quince Orchard Cluster of Montgomery County Council of Parent Teacher Associations

Testimony before the Board of Education November 14, 2007

President Navarro,
Dr. Weast,
Members of the Board of Education

Quince Orchard Cluster acknowledges the latest capital improvements inside our boundaries. A new gym is open in Thurgood Marshall ES and the 10 room addition to Fields Road ES will be completed by the end of the school year. Your efforts on our behalf have been noted with appreciation.

We find ourselves at odds with the rest of The Superintendent's Recommended FY2009 Capital Budget and the FY2009 Capital Improvements Program.

We ended the June 2007 the school year with some confidence that the deficiencies in the school facilities in Quince Orchard were in the program. Brown Station ES was in the program for renovation in 2016. Ridgeview Middle school was in the program with plans to correct the notable dysfunctions in its facility. Rachel Carson overcrowding relief was in the program with studies to add capacity at two other elementary schools in the cluster.

The Superintendent's recommendation for FY2009 leaves us asking "What happened to the program?"

We have read about the funding cutbacks. We note the irony in a budget that increases overall, yet cuts at the same time.

We have heard, and are appreciative of, the Board asking questions seeking adjustments to realign and reinstate these cuts.

We realize that there are difficult decisions ahead for the Board, Superintendent Weast, MCPS staff, the County Council, and our respective communities.

We are here tonight seeking adjustments to the program, and to ask the Board to direct that MCPS advise and consult with our communities about the priorities at our facilities. The problems at our facilities present staff and administration day by day difficulties in conducting education and we agonize to see their corrections postponed to some indistinct future.

Brown Station Elementary School

Modernization at Brown Station is thankfully still in the program, waiting for 2016. Brown Station ES is the oldest facility in our cluster and is in need of an overhaul. This facility has been in the program before, and passed over. We have watched in frustration as emphasis was instead placed on building new facilities. We consider Brown Station a top priority, and offer thanks that it has been retained in the current program and urge that it not be passed over again.

Ridgeview Middle School

The most significant problems at Ridgeview Middle School did not make the program. Program cuts affected the Ridgeview community's highest priority problems. Improvements to relocate lockers and the administrative offices and correct vehicular flow on the site have not been cut, but these improvements are not among the Ridgeview community's highest priorities.

The highest priorities include the corrections for proper ventilation, for the lack of natural light, for safety issues concerning stairwells, for elimination of blind corners and narrow halls. These

Brown Station Elementary
Fields Road Elementary
Jones Lane Elementary
Rachel Carson Elementary
Thurgood Marshall Elementary

Lakelands Park Middle
Ridgeview Middle

Quince Orchard High

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issues impact the school every moment of every day. For staff members who work on the lower level, and who strive to provide the highest quality school program, the personal sacrifice and commitment are huge. The lack of proper ventilation, heating, and cooling definitely impact on the morale of the school community and staff's ability to assure the highest levels of teaching, learning, and school programs. Teachers and high quality staff are often lured away by the idea of working in a facility in which the most basic levels of human comfort and functionality are met, so that they can focus on students, professional collaboration, school community, and learning.

The latest proposal for revising the scope of the Ridgeview project attempts to address some of the high priority problems. In a recent presentation MCPS included major revisions and repairs for the HVAC systems. We are grateful for this much, but remain anxious that the execution of these changes, absent community input, can easily make the situation worse. MCPS has offered assurances that as the revisions are planned the community will be engaged, and we urge the Board to require it.

Even after implementation of this revised scope Ridgeview will still be a dysfunctional facility. This facility has also been in the program before, and passed over. We are at odds to imagine how many more years it can be made to function solely by the interventions of staff and administration.

We understand the budgetary pressures, but we urge the Board to retain wording that recognizes these problems in the CIP. We feel strongly that it is not acceptable to shuffle these problems along to the 'normal' modernization schedule, to a time when most of the people in this room will likely be dead. This facility has been dysfunctional for some time, and should not be expected to remain so until some indefinite future. We ask that you recognize an obligation to "RENEW RIDGEVIEW!"

Overcrowding at Rachel Carson Elementary School

Don't export overcrowding

Overcrowding relief at Rachel Carson did not make the program, or at least not in any recognizable manner. Studies to build two additions on other elementary schools to provide 10 rooms of capacity have been shelved and replaced with a recommendation to move a 4 room ELC from RCES to Jones Lane ES.

Jones Lane is a facility currently over capacity. A 3 room LAD will be phased out to accommodate the ELC move. The 4 room ELC will appropriate another room from the general population which is itself projected to increase. JLES already has 2 portables, and in 2010 with this recommendation it may need six or more.

Exporting overcrowding from one school to another does not seem like a wise decision when there are alternatives. Several alternatives involving facilities with excess capacity combined with moves of smaller Special Ed programs do not seem to have been given much consideration. MCPS has explained that distribution of Special Ed programs across facilities guided their recommended placement of the 4 room ELC at JLES, but we recommend placement of a smaller Special Ed program.

We urge the Board to task MCPS to engage the communities involved to explore alternatives that do not result in exporting overcrowding from one school to another.

RCES will remain overcrowded

Even after the ELC shift, Rachel Carson ES is still projected to remain overcrowded for the foreseeable future. A request for two more portables has been issued, bringing the total to eight. Blacktop area will be mostly occupied with portables, and we request additional blacktop area to accommodate this loss be inserted into this CIP.

The recommended CIP offers no outlook to the time when this school can be administered without 5 lunch periods, with its blacktop free of portables, and at its designed capacity. With the removal of the ELC, and 2 more portables, there are very few adjustments remaining. Given the particular growth characteristics of this community and the fact that projections are habitually incorrect, it would already appear necessary to develop additional plans to relieve Rachel Carson Elementary School.

Problems with Planning Projections

QOHS was opened in 1988 and the original boundaries were forged out of Wooton and Gaithersburg clusters. Jones Lane, opened a few years before was included in its boundaries, along with Darnestown, Fields Road and Brown Station. Rachel Carson opened in 1990. Thurgood Marshall opened in 1993. In 1998 parts of the cluster were re-boundaried to Northwest. In 2001 elementary school boundaries were rewritten to accommodate overcrowding at Rachel Carson. In 2005 middle school boundaries were recast to populate Lakelands Park Middle school and resolve overcrowding at Kingsview middle school in the NW cluster. And most recently, more, largely unanticipated overcrowding at Rachel Carson, threatens to redraw our boundaries again.

Development has slowed down, but for the last fifteen years it can be characterized as single family detached dwelling units of 3000 sq.ft or more, on very reduced lots, typically in some kind of "mixed use" configuration that combines light retail with residential. Our recent experience suggests that there is something happening in these kinds of communities that make it difficult to apply the same projection models that the MCPS planning department is in the habit of using.

Most of our growth related issues in Quince Orchard Cluster have been attributable to the nature of growth in the particular communities of the Kentlands and Lakelands. These communities, typical of "mixed use" developments are assigned to Rachel Carson. Overcrowding at Rachel Carson has forced boundary changes in 2001 and RCES currently has 6 portables on site and is projected to be overcrowded for the foreseeable future.

Our experience is a cautionary tale for the Northwest and Clarksburg Clusters. Northwest is experiencing the same kind of mysterious over population at Matsunaga, a school whose boundaries include similar kinds of new development. Clarksburg is built on a very similar model as Kentlands and Lakelands, and is experiencing projection failure on a yearly basis.

It is clear that these problems might be alleviated if population projections for each neighborhood of this nature could be separated from the application of a county wide model. Donna Pfeifer, the Cluster Coordinator for Clarksburg cluster has enlightened the planning office to errors in its projections at the High School and Middle school levels in Clarksburg neighborhoods by using simple shoe leather methods. Something different is happening in these communities and we ignore the need to have better projections at the peril of eternal boundary studies. Among possible ways to address the problem would be to manage projection with cluster based statistics. There may be ways of obtaining aggregated sanitized birth records by street name.

We would like to urge the Board to direct MCPS Planning department to probe for the causes behind the planning failures in these three clusters. We will be requesting allocations in the Operating Budget to assist the planning office in getting to the root of these failures.

Quince Orchard Cluster appreciates the opportunity to speak to you tonight and trusts that you will carefully consider our requests for these adjustments to the Superintendent's Recommended FY2009 Capital Budget and the FY2009 Capital Improvements Program.
