



**Testimony to the Montgomery County Council on the
FY 2009 Capital Budget and the
FY 2009-2014 Capital Improvements Program
February 6, 2008**

Good evening, President Knapp and members of the County Council. I am Jane de Winter, President of the Montgomery County Council of PTAs. I speak tonight on behalf of the over 52,000 parents and more than 137,000 MCPS students advocating for every child to attend school in a safe, secure and modern facility.

MCCPTA supports the Board of Education's adopted FY 2009 Capital Budget and the FY 2009-2014 Capital Improvements Program. We recognize that this is a difficult year fiscally. We continue to support, as we have in the past, all efforts to ensure that Montgomery County obtains its fair share of funding for school construction from the State of Maryland. We are extremely grateful that the County Executive recommended full funding of the FY 2009 MCPS Capital Budget in his proposed FY 2009-2014 CIP even though the County Executive's overall recommendation was for \$75million less than the BOE's adopted budget. We look to you to fill this gap in funding for the out years of the capital budget by increasing the spending affordability guidelines and borrowing more in this time of low interest rates and to look for other sources of funding.

Even before the Superintendent released his memo outlining potential ways of meeting the \$75 million dollar shortfall, parents knew the key word was "delay". All options are ugly. All involve delays of projects that have already been delayed: delays of modernizing old buildings with serious facility defects; delays in building new seats; delays in upgrading facilities to meet programmatic needs, such as for signature programs and for students enrolled in the Fundamental Life Skills curriculum. We urge the Council to seek additional sources of funding so that the county can properly meet the capital needs of the school system.

You know that constraints in state and local funding as well as continuing construction cost increases meant the BOE's adopted budget already included the elimination, downsizing, or delay of multiple projects; the worsening fiscal situation puts additional delays on the table. However, rather than lowering expectations, we think it is more urgent than ever to work together to develop a vision of where we think we need to go to address the ever increasing capacity demands, the ever expanding maintenance backlog, and the oft delayed modernization schedule. Last year we proposed a CIP task force specifically to address long range planning for capital needs for our schools. We would like to move forward with this effort to build a shared vision. It is our joint responsibility to sit down together with other interested parties and look at the whole picture and plan for both the long- and short-term. We outlined many of these broader issues last year and you will find a list attached.

Tonight you will hear from clusters throughout the county. Each will describe its need for adequate facilities and describe the shortcomings in their current facilities. Our collective objective is simple. We all want to ensure that MCPS provides appropriate learning facilities to meet the needs of our students for a safe, secure and modern classroom. As you confront the difficult task of setting county-wide priorities in a time of limited funding, we again urge you to remember that excellence in learning requires excellent learning facilities.

We appreciate this opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the children of Montgomery County and look forward to working with you to meet the needs of all MCPS students.

Broad Issues facing MCPS facilities:

- Is there a plan for how to accelerate the modernization schedule?
- Where is the plan for additional holding schools?
- What happens when we need a high school holding school?
- Where is the serious discussion on doing full modernizations vs smaller renovations based on the Council report?
- When might those renovations or core improvements with an addition be appropriate?
- How can the FACT score process be improved?
- How will changing demographics affect facility and program needs? Can we improve the county's ability to forecast demographic shifts?
- How can we address the huge backlog of maintenance projects?
- What will the impact of new educational specifications for high schools mean?
- Where will the new mid-county high school be located?
- Will we need additional school sites?
- Where might they be located?
- How can we work with the county to ensure adequate school seats arrive hand in hand with new developments?
- How will special education programs be incorporated in this long-range planning to prevent frequent program changes and overcrowding due to the growth in these programs?