



The Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations

**Before the Montgomery County Board of Education  
MCCPTA Testimony  
Superintendent's Recommended  
FY 2011 Capital Budget and  
the FY 2011-2016 Capital Improvements Program  
November 11, 2009**

**“Maximum Advantage”**

Good evening, President Brandman and Members of the Board of Education. I am Kay Romero, President of the Montgomery County Council of PTAs. I speak tonight on behalf of the over 50,000 members in our organization to advocate for the welfare of the more than 140,000 MCPS students in the county. MCCPTA speaks with one voice for all children.

Tonight and tomorrow night, you will hear from cluster representatives about the individual needs of the cluster schools and special centers. Collectively, we appreciate the Superintendent's efforts to keep all projects on track, to address overcrowding in areas severely lacking capacity and to implement county-wide projects to renew and revitalize our school facilities. Our objective is simple. We all want to ensure that MCPS provides our students the best opportunities to learn. We believe that

excellence in learning requires excellent learning facilities. As you will hear in the testimony over these two nights, the projects listed in the CIP contribute directly to student success. Student achievement should not be compromised or delayed.

At the same time, we are here before you these next two days to say that the Board can do more, and can do it more wisely in some instances. Our theme this year is that the CIP must take “maximum advantage” of the opportunities before us.

**We urge you to take maximum advantage of the opportunity to address overcrowding.** The projects to relieve severe overcrowding in the Bethesda, Clarksburg, Northwest and Seneca Valley clusters are welcome, but other schools remain severely overcrowded with no visible relief in sight. And, we must recognize that for the past two years, kindergarten classes have been the largest ever, and are predicted to continue for a few years at least. The Board should be questioning whether we have adequate capacity to accommodate these students, not only at the elementary level but also at the middle and high school level. No student should spend all of his or her educational years in portables or a construction zone.

**We urge you to take maximum advantage of the opportunity presented by a down construction market.** If construction costs are significantly below recent experiences, now is not the time to be timid with preparing the backlog of additions and modernizations for bid. We should be allocating resources to accelerating the design process so that Glenallen ES, Hoover MS, and Gaithersburg HS – and others – can be bid in the current environment. To paraphrase a prominent commercial, “Six months can save 30% on construction costs.” That is an opportunity too good to pass up.

**We also should be taking maximum advantage of the money that you allocate to county-wide projects.** We are extremely pleased to see our calls for more HVAC spending have been heeded. The recommendation to triple spending on HVAC upgrades is as welcome as it is long overdue. More HVAC projects mean more consistent learning environments, healthier schools, and more efficient energy consumption. We need more well-defined county-wide programs that maintain our schools, that lessen the need for costly repairs and remediation, that lower energy usage and that improve security in existing school buildings.

However, we also must critically examine the effectiveness of these projects to ensure we are receiving maximum benefit from them. For example, although we continue to support the goal of ensuring that all restrooms have fixtures that work, floors and partitions in good order and generally are clean and well maintained, our experience with the first round of the restroom renovation project has been mixed at best. Before simply continuing with more of the same for another 100 schools, the Board should evaluate whether the objectives could be achieved through different means.

Our organization has a number of other broad concerns with the Superintendent's Recommendation. Despite efforts to "catch up" with deteriorating school buildings, MCPS continues to modernize at a pace that is too slow. In addition, we still do not see any real consideration of the capital needs of the Special Education Centers, none of which are scheduled for modernization or facility improvements other than restroom renovations.

We also are concerned that MCPS is rushing its outcome on the assessment of new schools not on the modernization list. We should establish the CIP Task Force we have been calling for to address our

modernization approach. We should take this year to examine the process for modernizing schools and the criteria to be used to assess schools for modernization, so that we can move forward in the next full CIP with the remaining assessments. MCCPTA also opposes the Superintendent's recommendation to rescind the Modernization Policy (Policy FKB). It is premature to make changes to the policy before the task force acts.

Finally, we have concerns with the procedures that are recommended to consider whether to close Monocacy Elementary School. Historically, MCCPTA has regarded the question of whether closure of a particular school is a prudent option to be a local PTA issue, but the question of the procedures to be followed is one of concern to our entire organization. The Board's consideration of a proposed closure must provide for adequate community input and, equally importantly, adequate time to evaluate the implications. We are concerned that boundary studies receive more time for community input and for Board consideration than the procedures proposed for Monocacy would allow. The COMAR requirements are mandatory minimums, but the Board should take the additional time to ensure a full and fair process before such decisions are made.

More detail regarding these recommendations is included in MCCPTA's written testimony. I urge you to review that testimony for additional support. Thank you and good evening.

Kay Romero, President of MCCPTA