

Poolesville Cluster Testimony
Capital Improvement Budget 11-12-09

My name is Sarah Defnet, and as the Cluster Coordinator for the Poolesville Cluster Schools I appreciate the opportunity to come before you tonight to testify on the Capital Improvement Program. We thank you again for your past support in building a world-class magnet program at Poolesville High School, and providing the commitment to support that program with the needed resources, by building and opening the Science and Technology building this fall. I want to emphasize that it is a facility used by ALL students at the school and one that we believe will ultimately contribute to increased student participation in the sciences, and an increased participation in advanced science classes, as students experience learning in authentic science labs. It is a data point that we as a cluster are interested in monitoring, along with subsequent achievement levels in the sciences so that we can report and demonstrate to you in future years a good return on our investment.

As a cluster we eagerly await the modernization of the remaining 9/10 of our school. We are pleased to see the CIP footnotes now acknowledging that schools with "modernization" dates before 1986 underwent renovations and not full modernizations of their facility. Poolesville High School was built in 1953, with a renovation to add some classrooms, a gym and auditorium in 1978. PHS was placed on the modernization list a decade ago, where it was initially thought that modernization would be accomplished by 2010. A decade later that date is estimated to be 2021, at best, at which time the school will be approaching 70 years in age. Testimony attachment #1 details the history and present concerns with PHS's modernization efforts.

As a cluster we would support Board of Education efforts to balance MCPS construction priorities and place modernizations at the same or higher level of priority consideration with additions. Health and Safety issues in our facilities must continue to receive the highest priority and we support the increase to HVAC projects to improve indoor air quality and recognize that it is significant. But in discussions regarding facility improvements, we have observed a real trend in MCPS and a culture of thinking that says additions are far easier to secure than modernizations. The only way to get attention it seems is to be overcapacity, which doesn't encourage smart planning. Schools in poor condition that do not exceed capacity have no priority until it becomes a health and safety issue, at which time bandaids are applied to remedy problems.

As a cluster we support the spirit of the recommendation of the January 2009 Maryland General Assembly Financial Management Practices Audit which recommends that MCPS periodically review the physical condition of its schools. We don't believe the intention was to have MCPS conduct FACT assessments for every school each year but rather to suggest that when a decade passes it's time to reassess the condition of schools still waiting for

modernization to see how changes have affected the immediacy of their situation. At the time of Poolesville's assessment, PHS was a much smaller school so its ESA score (essentially student crowding and safety) offset the FACT score and placed it in the middle of its wave. Since that time our school enrollment has increased by 50% stressing our school in ways that were not present during the initial FACT assessment. We urge you to consider directing some of the money budgeted for FACT assessments to update the assessment for Poolesville High School and give consideration to those results in deciding our timeline for modernization.

Finally, as you are well aware, the Poolesville Cluster opposes the Superintendent's October 23rd recommendation outlined in Supplement A to close Monocacy Elementary School. Throughout these two nights of testimony, you will hear many of the reasons and details that support keeping Monocacy Elementary School open – and why you need to reject Supplement A. While operating cost is a driving factor for MCPS to close Monocacy, it is only one of 8 equally weighted factors in the COMAR to be considered when deciding to close a school.

Time does not permit me to share all of the pros and cons of this proposal today– so I will highlight some of our cluster's initial overarching concerns with what has been proposed and the way it has been presented:

- The CIP should not be a vehicle for proposing a school closure. Conversations with the community should have been started in June at the start of the long range planning process and not the conclusion. As a school system we have invested a lot of money and resources in touting the Baldrige process in theory – but in practice we're obviously not there yet.
- The recommendation was prepared in five weeks without much time to possibly look at the total impact of consolidation and plan for needs that haven't been identified, and therefore won't be present in the current CIP or upcoming Operating Budget.
- The process itself is inconsistent with how MCPS has treated school closures in the past, and is treating other issues of similar magnitude in the current CIP. The process recommended in Supplement A is really a dual action, and not only recommends a school closure, but in effect recommends a boundary change for Poolesville Elementary, impacting both its programming and facilities. Had this been given the same treatment as other consolidations and boundary considerations, we wouldn't be here today demanding due process. In the same document there is a consolidation action at Maryvale that provides a great advocacy timeline of almost two years from start to finish. There are numerous other examples of roundtable discussions to address overall strategies for meeting needs in clusters. But not for Poolesville. For our proposed consolidation, we get essentially 2 months as a task force to prepare for hearings in a timeline that only provides 5 months from start to finish. Is 5 months the new timeline for consideration of school closures from this day forward?

- We have concerns about the data on which the recommendation is based: The recommendation contains no footnotes, or documentation to cite data sources or assumptions of the enrollment projections or projected savings. As a stakeholder we are at a major disadvantage without the same access to the data MCPS used to make their decisions. We have submitted a formal request for information – but such extraordinary efforts shouldn't be necessary in an environment that seeks to truly include stakeholders in the process.
- Poolesville Elementary School has not been assessed for modernization or programmed for any facility improvements or changes. While the capacity may seem to support a consolidation, the detailed analysis has not been done to ensure the school has the right types of spaces and its common services can support the needs of a combined school. (cafeteria, gym etc) There is no money programmed in the CIP to provide remedy if a mismatch occurs.
- The proposed recommendation does not address the overall enrollment needs of the cluster. Each year we stand here before you and testify about our concerns with our clusters school enrollment issues – the proposed solution still does not result in additional enrollment in the cluster, and thus at the middle school and may in fact limit growth and options for increasing middle school population once the schools are consolidated. It needs to be discussed, it's part of the picture – you can't make one decision without considering the whole – that's the type of thinking that lets a roof be replaced on a school you plan to close at the end of the year. In 2014, the CIP projects the enrollment at John Poole Middle School to be 245 students – or 51% of utilization of its capacity. While MCPS is not considering the closure of this school at this time- how will they be able to justify the cost to keep a school open that is 355 students below the Superintendent's recommended ideal size of 600 students, that is only at 51% utilization when we are meeting such great resistance in keeping a high performing elementary school that is operating within desired utilization ranges but misses the magic "300" number for elementary schools OPEN? We fail to see the consistency in the methodology being used from one situation to the next in making these decisions. Can we please have an enrollment roundtable, or whatever you want to call it to address the entire needs of the cluster and the projected decline of our middle school population. Consolidation will not reverse this trend and if anything will further limit the options to consider enrollment alternatives such as vschool choice. Please ask MCPS to come to table with us and proactively look for solutions to address the issue now.
- It sends a mixed message from the county when you don't consider the uniqueness of the ag reserve where development is limited by the master plan, and the limitation is used against the residents as criteria to close their school.

All of this MCPS proposes can be figured out during the 60 day window the task force has, after the process is approved. Sixty days is not adequate time to properly consider all of the issues created by the recommendation. The timeline also straddles the winter holiday season, and will ask a lot of the participants and our community to give this the attention it deserves. The timeline also coincides with the release of the Operating Budget, which should be our primary focus during December and January. MCPS is on the payroll as they research, consider and react to this proposal – we are not – we have our own jobs, families and responsibilities to juggle and so to add a responsibility of this magnitude to be completed in 60 days is an undue burden on our community.

We urge you to stand with us and hear our concerns with the details provided in the testimonies that follow tonight and reject Supplement A of the CIP and Keep Monocacy Open. Thank you .

Background: History

Appendix E of the Capital Improvement Budget (CIP) contains the list of the Modernization Schedule for Assessed Schools. The current approved schedule has Paint Branch, Gaithersburg, Wheaton, and Seneca Valley all scheduled for modernization through 2017. High Schools are generally on a 50 year modernization cycle. A new group of schools on the list behind Seneca Valley were just given a date with the release of the CIP – but it was said by the Department of Facilities Management (Crispell) in a meeting with the Cluster Coordinators in September 2009, that we could extrapolate the date for Poolesville High School to be 2021 – that is 11 years later than the first date (2010) that was announced in the 1990’s when my children were in elementary school.

Schools are ranked in priority order on the modernization schedule by their FACT score. The Facilities Assessment with Criteria Testing (FACT) tool was developed in the early 1990’s in cooperation with the state and others to objectively evaluate facility condition and program capability for buildings in need of major modernizations. MCPS estimates that comprehensive FACT assessments cost between \$5K and \$15K per building to conduct. During the decade of the 1990’s, MCPS conducted a large number of FACT assessments and established a priority list for school modernizations that is still being used today.¹ That list is published in Appendix E of the MCPS Capital Improvement Program Budget book.

The review process used for school modernization is based on a score for facility condition (FACT) and the student crowding and safety (ESA) factor. The combined score for a new school would be 2000. The schools that appear on the Modernization list in Appendix E of the CIP have been reviewed in “waves”, Poolesville High School being in the last of those waves.² Those reviewed in the first waves are put on the modernization list before those in latter waves, even if their scores are better (i. e., they are in better physical shape) than those reviewed later. That is one reason why Poolesville High School is not in the CIP budget for the next six years for modernization.

The next set of high schools slated for modernization by MCPS do not yet have a projected start date. Poolesville High School, built in 1953 is assigned a higher FACT score than schools built more recently (1970’s) and therefore appears behind many schools that are actually in better physical condition. One reason given in 2002, to explain our placement on the list, was that Poolesville High at the time of assessment was a small school and so its ESA score (essentially student crowding and safety) was relatively high. The ESA score offset the FACT score (the school’s overall facility condition) and put it the middle of its wave. Since 1999 when Poolesville High School was initially assessed, the school became a whole school magnet and in the process, the

¹ Financial Management Practices Performance Audit Report MCPS January 2009, Office of Legislative Audits, Maryland General Assembly

² Testimony and letter to Dr. Weast by Cluster Coordinator Link Hoewing, July 15, 2002

school's population increased by almost 50% as it began serving students from outside the cluster.

The PHS Community suggests that the FACT score also fails to reveal the whole story at Poolesville High School. The initial FACT score does not reveal that the school had only a "patchwork" modernization in 1978. Many classrooms were not touched during that process. Some of the classrooms are virtually unchanged since they were originally built in 1953. In 1978 the school received an auditorium, a gymnasium, a new brick façade, and some classrooms. By today's standards, the 1978 "modernization" would be considered an addition – to provide equality in facilities readily available to other high schools to the Poolesville community. The FACT score also doesn't reflect that Poolesville High School was built as a Junior-Senior High School, and as such, the hallways and classrooms across half of the building were built to middle school size standards, including narrower and smaller hallways and classrooms in comparison to high school size standards present in other MCPS high schools. Some hallways have only 5-7 feet of clearance, causing difficulties in passage with the new population. Additionally, most of the classrooms are on the interior of the building, and our students can go through an entire school day without a window to the outside world. Even the classrooms added in 1978 on the outside of the building were added without windows. Many of the classrooms are smaller than standard classrooms making it difficult to place 32 desks in the room. Many classrooms are so crammed that the teachers cannot circulate the classroom easily– there isn't enough room to get by. It is also relevant to note, that in the 1978 modernization, many of the materials installed in our school were castoffs from other school renovations – so we received the discards of other renovation efforts in the way of lab tables and science cabinets.

Even if the school's assessed capacity were to reflect perfect utilization - this statistic would fail to take into account the crowding issues associated with the narrow hallways and smaller classrooms (with smaller desks) in the half of the school that was built to house the middle school students (before John Poole Middle School was opened in 1997). The FACT score also doesn't properly reflect that most multipurpose areas were not designed to accommodate the number of students we have today, for the purpose in which they were intended. For example, our cafeteria is smaller than the cafeteria at John Poole Middle School and as such, kids typically have no choice but to eat in hallways, classrooms or (for juniors and seniors) leave campus for lunch. Additionally there is insufficient storage at the school – and no third multipurpose physical education area, or wrestling, so the wrestling mats and pallets of paper are a permanent fixture in the cafeteria, further reducing the available floor space.

Poolesville Cluster Approach

Surely no one envisioned when the FACT scores were assigned to schools in the mid 1990's to 2000 that in 2010 we would still be a decade away from implementing many of the modernizations. At the current rate, Poolesville High School won't be replaced until 2021 – nearly 70 years after it was built, patched and added onto – well beyond the 50 year cycle target for high school modernization. In light of all the changes in

programming at the school and the increase in population at our school, and in consideration of the fact that an additional 10 years have passed since the assessments were made, the Poolesville Cluster requests that BOE require MCPS to conduct a new FACT assessment of (at least) the schools that do not yet have a projected modernization date.

The Financial Management Practices Performance Audit Report conducted by the General Assembly in January 2009 recommended that MCPS conduct more frequent reassessments of their facilities. MCPS responded that they did not agree with the recommendation, stating that a biannual assessment at 5-10K per school would cost 1 million a year. While we are not suggesting that we reassess the FACT scores of every school, every two years (nor do we believe that was the GA's intention) we are suggesting that when a decade has passed and most everyone associated with the original assessment has moved on, it is time to look at the schools again.

A few weeks ago I toured one of the schools ahead of PHS on the modernization schedule and found it simply stunning. And while I understand the need in this cluster for additional capacity – this is clearly not a case where the modernization dictates replacing the entire school – particularly given the state of many of the schools in our county. Construction funds are limited and then to be appropriated wisely. The school facilities do impact student success – the learning environment makes a difference.

Attachment #2: General Observations Regarding Poolesville High School Facility

Below is a limited list – just a start from some initial walk throughs of the building. All areas have not been examined, but we will forward updates as they become available.

- I will request work order data from our Building Manager, showing the number of open work order requests, and try and get a sense of how many work orders have been submitted this year. (requested, but has not been provided, information is not being shared at this time, maybe you can get the data and share it with us)
- Half of the lights in the auditorium (or building – verify) don't work
- The new speakers installed in the auditorium don't work. A work order has been submitted.
- The upholstery on the chairs in the auditorium is worn (1978?)
- While most schools are turning off the lights to realize energy savings, PHS has been instructed to leave the lights on in certain areas (bathrooms) to retard mold growth, and reduce smells.
- There is only one working water fountain in the Gym area – and it is by the exterior entrance hallway that should be locked out of the range of supervision and near the exterior school doors.
- Insufficient storage space
- No facility for wrestling or multipurpose area for aerobics or cardio classes. Wrestling practice is in the cafeteria where mats are permanently stored rolled up –taking up part of the limited floor space
- The Gym is small, and the auxillary gym is the size of middle school gym, the bleachers do not accommodate many for athletic competitions. (4-5 rows on each side)
- Most HS gyms are the size of at least two full size basketball courts – ours is the size one – when it rains and classes come indoor they must combine the classes since we only have two spaces and our gym is not large enough to accommodate two classes – we class a third space other schools have
- The offices in the locker room do not provide visibility or easy accessibility to the students
- There is a sewage issue in the showers in the locker room , smells appear on occasion, showers are working but not used – generally only by visiting football teams – pretty disgusting
- Only 1 team room, visiting athletic teams must be placed in a classroom, team room pretty disgusting
- The weight room is part of the old automotive repair area, and should not be count as capacity other than the two periods it is used – as it can be used for anything other than a weight room.

Attachment #3 History of Special Programs at Monocacy ES

In the early days, Monocacy Elementary School had a half day kindergarten program, with one class in every grade. Fast forward to the year 1988. Poolesville Elementary School is overcrowded so MCPS approved a renovation to Monocacy Elementary School to support two classes per grade level that was completed in 1989. As part of a unique program to address the enrollment needs of the cluster, MCPS made a commitment to bus transportation to students residing in the Poolesville Elementary School draw area, to Monocacy. As part of the renovation they created a special TV production studio, (which about the time of Reading Initiative and demand for classroom space, was eventually returned to classroom space) and a Spanish program. A computer lab was also created with a joint corporate contribution to fund the lab (back in the day when no school had a computer lab, let alone an elementary school).

The school leadership under the direction of its' Principal, Jerry Perlet, very actively recruited students and supported the programs of the school. To Mr. Perlet, Monocacy was "A place to learn, and a place to love". He repeatedly shared with parents that MCPS was committed to not letting Monocacy fall below two classes per grade. School leadership and teachers would frequently go out into the community to market the programs, talk to preschool parents, and invite to come see what Monocacy had to offer. The kindergarten teacher at the time, grew and maintained the program at a level of about 50 kindergarten students (half day morning and afternoon kindergarten) . The program was in such demand, that a lottery was necessary to fairly award the limited number of spots in the classes. For a brief two year period, all day kindergarten was piloted at the school and became an additional draw for attendance. Budget cuts followed, and the all day kindergarten program was eventually cut and the program was returned to a half day program, in a similar fashion as occurred across the county. The school leadership understood that sustaining the program also required marketing and involvement in the community. As school leadership evolved, MCPS did not mentor or guide successive Principals in the importance of the marketing and recruiting process.

In the year following the kindergarten teacher's 2001 retirement, there were also changes in the school administration and the incoming kindergarten class dwindled to 39, and continued to slide from that day forward. Recruiting stopped, and MCPS provided no leadership in sustaining the enrollment at the school.

The Spanish program began around the time of the modernization in 1989. It began as a program with daily Spanish instruction. Staffing support was reduced over time and the number of days of Spanish instruction each week was gradually stepped down from five days, to three days, to twice – to once a week. The school leadership then began to allocate the staffing in different ways – under pressure to direct resources to math and reading they started to change the scope of the program and reallocate the resources to reading and math assistance. When the program started in 1989, there were 1.5 Spanish teachers (sixth grade was still in the building and two classes per grade) and in 2005/2006 it was totally disbanded and converted to an after school FLES program funded by parent paid tuition. By the time the Spanish program was dismantled, the staffing allocation for

the Spanish teacher had been reduced to part time. Along the way, the school leadership changed the scope of the program to only include the upper elementary grades (3,4,5) and made participation optional, placing most of the burden on the students to make up any work they missed while in Spanish (regular instruction often continued in the classroom while they were in Spanish). Placing this burden on elementary school students to become responsible for work they missed was one more change that limited participation in the program to the most over-achieving and organized students (among third through fifth graders). Thus, the program saw further declines in participation. Waiting until third grade to start the program, also missed out on the opportunity to build the hunger for the knowledge and the excitement for language that you might garner in a K-1 student. Thus fewer and fewer students elected for this optional academic class, and the staff position decreased to a .5 (or less).

Little Known Facts About Monocacy Elementary School:

When the 1989 renovation added the Gym, it was not built for the school, but for the community . In the pre-ICB days (when the school managed the use of the gym) , the gym was very actively used by the community. It is a beautiful large gym with wood floors – larger than the gym at PES, and many elementary schools. The playground replaced in 2006 as a matching effort – with a lot of hard work in fundraising by the parent community.

There is a commemorative garden (established in 1998) in the Butterfly courtyard that has a stepping stone for every teacher that graced the halls of Monocacy, who either retired from teaching, or died. It used be said that the only way to get a staff spot at Monocacy – was when a teacher retired or died.