

THE NORTHEAST CONSORTIUM

A Consortium of the Blake, Paint Branch and Springbrook Clusters

Comments on the FY 2011 Capital Budget and the FY 2011-2016 Capital Improvements Program

On behalf of The NEC Middle Schools

November 12, 2009

Good evening Superintendent Weast, Mrs. Brandman, and members of the Board. I am Lee Ann Doerflinger, Blake Cluster Coordinator, and I am here this evening to speak on behalf of the middle schools of the Northeast Consortium. We have five: Briggs Chaney, White Oak, Francis Scott Key, Benjamin Banneker, and William Farquhar, which we share with the Sherwood cluster. Key has just been modernized and has reopened in its new building: the Consortium community thanks you for this beautiful new school.

Much work remains to be done in the middle schools of the Consortium however. Benjamin Banneker Middle School was built in the mid-1970s as an "open" school which means that the building was not meant to have internal walls separating classrooms, an arrangement that was tried and eventually abandoned in many schools around the country. Banneker has adapted to changing thinking and has filled in the walls between classrooms that have been carved out of existing space, but this has led to strange traffic patterns and odd configurations, such as having to pass through one classroom to get to another. This is understandably distracting to students. Relocatable classrooms serve only as a temporary solution to the problem as they have their own challenges of maintenance, air quality and security.

White Oak and Briggs Chaney are recommended for restroom renovations. Unfortunately, following the recommended schedule would mean that White Oak's renovation would occur during the 2013-14 school year and Brigg Chaney's in 2014-15. In view of this year's flu epidemic, it would seem that this is totally inadequate. Comments from Briggs Chaney indicate that keeping enough soap in the bathrooms is a major problem: soap is the first line of defense in preventing the spread of the flu virus. Improving soap dispensers four years from now is not going to help with our current and ongoing problem. In general MCCPTA would like MCPS to revisit the restroom renovation policy: the current program moves very slowly and generally could only be described as refurbishment of those restrooms rather than renovation since with only a couple of exceptions it has been mostly repair and replacement of broken fixtures. Indeed, much of what is done under the restroom renovation program would seem to be more accurately classified as maintenance. We urge you to consider finding a more efficient plan to keep school restrooms sanitary and functional.

Farquhar Middle School, which sends students to both the Northeast Consortium and Sherwood High School, is deeply concerned about the traffic patterns and access to the school. If any of you lack excitement in your lives, I recommend a drive to Farquhar Middle School after sunset. Batchellors Forest Road is very narrow and unlit because of its status as a “rustic road”, an historic preservation designation that will not change; every time I drive to this school for a meeting, I arrive in the parking lot shaking. Recent building on this road has increased traffic flow as well, making access to the school even more difficult. Farquhar is programmed for modernization with completion in August of 2015 according to the Superintendent’s Recommended FY 2011 Capital Budget and FY 2011-2016 Capital Improvements Program (page 4-73) but I fear that the traffic safety issues will not wait that long. Moreover, the CIP does not fund the Improved (Safe) Access to Schools project after FY 2012: in view of the problems with access at Farquhar, it would seem that this project still has work to do and MCCPTA would like to see it continued past 2012.

Clearly, capital improvement projects and maintenance projects can overlap or at least bump up against each other. It is sometimes difficult for us as parents to discern which category a particular project might fall under or why certain projects are scheduled for completion earlier than others. Greater parental and community participation in these decisions, as well as more transparency in the reasoning behind them could save us all a lot of time and potentially money.

We understand that the budget is very tight this year and will be for several years to come. For this reason, it is important that the Board of Education and the County use those funds to maximum advantage in the county-wide projects that affect the health and safety of our students, and that optimize the educational environments in which they learn.

Thank you.

The Northeast Consortium Cluster Coordinators

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