

**Montgomery County Board of Education
FY 2011 Capital Budget and the
FY 2011-2016 Capital Improvements Program**

**Whitman Cluster
November 11, 2009**

Good evening, President Brandman, Members of the School Board and Dr. Weast. I am Keith Parsky, representing the Whitman Cluster: Go Vikings! We appreciate this opportunity to testify on the Superintendent's Recommended FY 2011 Capital Budget and the 2011-2016 Capital Improvements Program.

The Whitman Cluster believes the Superintendent's Recommended CIP displays creativity and vision. The Whitman Cluster feels and understands the over-enrollment pressure felt throughout the County. Overutilization in our grade schools, on average, tops 125% and our middle school is now at 107% capacity, with little or no room for future expansion. We are, therefore, grateful to the Board and the Superintendent for the leadership shown in addressing the most pressing construction needs in schools across the County and in our Cluster. We recognize the very tight budgetary constraints, but with the cost of money and construction at an all time low, we urge the Board to, as President Brandman so aptly put it, take "maximum advantage" of the construction market, so that we can accommodate the tremendous enrollment pressure and growth facing our schools.

The Cluster projects under way and those recommended in the CIP must move forward to alleviate overutilization at schools. The investment is worth it!

We again want to thank you and the Superintendent for the recent construction in the Whitman Cluster. Pyle Middle School's long awaited addition was completed last year and was essential to absorb increased enrollment. With enrollment currently at 1338 students, Pyle has the highest enrollment of any middle school in the County. And as predicted, growth in the Whitman Cluster continues, with a significant rise in elementary school enrollment. The Whitman Cluster is particularly concerned that enrollment levels at Pyle, our only middle school, could push even higher than anticipated and even sooner than projected (during the course of this CIP period). We ask that MCPS, the Superintendent and the Board of Education continue to monitor the growth in the Whitman Cluster to assure adequate planning time to address this pressure-- particularly given the site limitations at Pyle Middle School.

We are thrilled that Carderock Springs Elementary School is meeting its timetable and cost projections for its first modernization since it opened in 1966. Not only did its move to the Radnor Holding facility go smoothly, but the entire Carderock Springs community is eagerly looking forward to its new building and gym still scheduled for completion in August 2010.

Bradley Hills Elementary School appreciates the bathroom renovations that were made this past summer. They happily report that the stench that used to plague the bathrooms is gone! But above all, Bradley Hills is extraordinarily grateful for the leadership shown in advancing plans for an addition to address the

overcrowding in this very small and old building, which has never truly been modernized.

With a program capacity of only 342, Bradley Hills is at 138% capacity, now serving 472 students with enrollment projected to continue increasing throughout the 2011-16 CIP period. Bradley Hills, originally built over 60 years ago and marginally renovated in 1984, is the seventh smallest, and one of the oldest, elementary schools in the County. It is the only school in MCPS that has only one kindergarten classroom, placing many kindergarteners in environments not suitable for their development. The school currently has six portables and population is expected to exceed capacity by six to eight classrooms throughout the six year CIP period, We thank everyone who had a hand in addressing these concerns, and we ask that the Board adopt the Superintendent's recommendation for design and construction of the addition beginning in January 2012.

Specifically, we strongly urge you to support the Superintendent's recommendation to expand Bradley Hills' administrative suite and All Purpose Room. We have serious fire safety concerns, as well as the overwhelming need to accommodate current students and future enrollment from Bethesda Elementary. The Bradley Hills All Purpose Room, with a capacity of 141 students, is one of the two smallest in Montgomery County. We informed the Board of Education last year that Bradley Hills All Purpose Room is already at fire code capacity during most lunch periods. As a result of the small size of the room, serving the current

student population requires lunch periods spanning from 11 am until 12:45 pm, a practice that unquestionably impacts instruction. In addition, the Bradley Hills stage is not handicapped accessible—a significant challenge for at least one current student. MCPS staff has advised that there is not enough room to add a ramp.

Moreover, Bradley Hills agrees with the CIP that if the western portion of the Bethesda Elementary school service area is reassigned to Bradley Hills after the boundary study, improvements to and expansion of the Bradley Hills All Purpose Room would be even more of a necessity. The Bradley Hills APR, which again is one of the two smallest in the entire County, simply cannot accommodate additional students from Bethesda Elementary.¹

Overcrowding has also become a serious problem at Wood Acres Elementary School. Over-enrolled by 184 students, Wood Acres currently has five portables, and the projections for Wood Acres indicate that enrollment will continue to significantly exceed capacity throughout the six year planning period 2011-2016. Because of the significant overenrollment at Wood Acres, specialists in music, P.E., art, instrumental music, and ESOL are forced to share small rooms, use the cafeteria, and work on carts.

Due to site and facility constraints at Wood Acres, the Superintendent has recommended that capacity studies be conducted to determine the feasibility of constructing classroom additions at Wood Acres Elementary School and also at

¹ The BCC Cluster traditionally testifies on behalf of Bethesda Elementary. The Whitman Cluster joins with the BCC Cluster in advocating for thoughtful consideration in how the boundary change is implemented to address concerns and minimize negative impacts on the community.

nearby Bannockburn Elementary School. Although it is far too early to gauge community support for a boundary shift and an addition that will by necessity change the nature of a small, neighborhood school, the Whitman Cluster is in full support of an FY 2011 appropriation for facility planning funds to examine Wood Acres and Bannockburn Elementary Schools.

We believe these two situations can be dealt with wisely, if the solutions are properly planned and implemented. The creative ideas espoused in the Superintendent's CIP may very well provide a "win-win" solution for all impacted schools. However, we caution that beyond making the physical accommodations, changing articulation patterns can add emotional stress for families, and all of these issues require careful and compassionate consideration.

We would also like to express our strong support for continuing the Restroom Renovation projects and implementing the new schedule proposed by the Superintendent. Schools that were placed last in the queue are now finally up for renovation. Some of those schools, like Bannockburn, have plumbing that is still circa the 1950s. However, as a natural consequence of being last, schools at the end of the rotation face the tyranny of those that came first. Although we recognize that schools that have already enjoyed the restroom renovation cycle have pulled their support for this program, we strongly believe that, in fairness, we owe it to these remaining schools to continue with restroom renovations. The entire Whitman Cluster supports these renovations.

We are likewise pleased that the Superintendent's proposed CIP includes a recommendation for updating the FACT assessment tool that reflects new building codes, real educational program needs and a community involvement component. However, we have been and remain concerned that the cutoff date used for FACT assessments is artificial. We have consistently urged MCPS to assess all schools that were supposedly modernized before 1990 because modernizations that took place in the 1980s show little similarity to the modernizations taking place today. We hope that MCPS will explain the rationale behind any cut-off date used, for we do not see the difference between modernizations done in 1986 and those done in 1987, 1988, and 1989.

Finally, as we have in past years, we urge that routine building maintenance continues to be addressed. Although we recognize that this is also an operating budget issue, we urge that maintenance be a priority. Bathrooms, heating and air conditioning, playground blacktops, and lead in the pipes, all of these problems need to be addressed, not just in our cluster, but in the entire County. To optimize the learning process, every child needs to attend school in a safe, secure and modern facility.

We recognize your support of our schools' construction needs, and hope that you will take maximum advantage of the favorable construction market. We, in turn, pledge to continue working with you to ensure that our County and State legislators appropriate the funds necessary to make this CIP a reality.