

**Written Testimony of
Steve Augustino
On Behalf of the
Gaithersburg Cluster**

**Montgomery County Council
February 17, 2010**

Good evening, President Floreen and members of the County Council. It is with great pleasure that I submit these comments on the County Executive's proposed Fiscal Year 2011 Capital Budget and FY 2011-16 CIP. I am thrilled to be able to ask you to support a CIP that – finally – has funds in it to address the Gaithersburg cluster's most important construction project, the replacement of Gaithersburg High School's building. With luck, in a little over a year, we will be breaking ground on a modern facility that will benefit our students and our community for years to come.

Our cluster supports the testimony of MCCPTA concerning the CIP. The budget before you addresses three key objectives of our organization -- (1) increasing county-wide renewal projects like HVAC replacements, (2) addressing severe overcrowding in our schools and (3) keeping planned additions and modernizations on track. All of these objectives are worthy, but I know you will understand if I concentrate on the value of the last item on the list – keeping our planned modernizations on track.

Now is the best time to invest in our school infrastructure. Our needs are high, but borrowing costs are low and construction costs are lower. In years past, the high school modernizations were targeted as “elephants” potentially dragging down the CIP budget. But the economic downturn has presented a unique opportunity. The Paint Branch modernization project was recently bid at a savings of nearly \$30 million. What does that savings mean in this budget? It means we can do more for our schools with roughly the same amount of money. The \$30 million saved on Paint Branch allows MCPS to construct an entirely new elementary school (which costs roughly \$22 million). The \$30 million saved on Paint Branch pays for the three addition projects that will end the moratorium in the BCC cluster (they cost \$27.5 million). The \$30 million saved on Paint Branch pays for the entire increase in the HVAC replacement program for three years to come. The \$30 million saved on Paint Branch pays for half the FY 11 cost of all the additions in the CIP.

So, while some criticized the high school modernizations as a drag on our resources, in reality, the elephants are leading the parade. And we can do more in the coming years, if the full CIP is funded. Already, MCPS has lowered its estimated cost of Gaithersburg High School by nearly \$25 million. We are pushing MCPS to move faster with the design of the next group of schools on our list – Gaithersburg HS, Hoover MS, Glenallen ES, Beverly Farms ES and Bel Pre ES. If we're aggressive but smart, we can lock in additional savings that can be used on other much-needed projects. The elephants indeed will lead the parade.

Lastly, we support the Board of Education's CIP worksession as an important step in analyzing CIP priorities and, hopefully, streamlining the modernization process. FACT assessments remain a mystery to most, if not all, school communities. And, in the 10-20 years that schools wait on the modernization list, conditions can deteriorate rapidly, causing one to question the continued legitimacy of FACT rankings. We would like to see a comprehensive review of the criteria before we use them to assess another round of schools. We also hope that the worksession can lead to improvements to shorten the modernization schedule and accelerate the design process for modernizing schools.

In closing, I want to thank you for the attention you have given to Gaithersburg's concerns. For years, you have heard the Gaithersburg cluster say that its number one CIP priority is the long-overdue replacement of our high school. The project is starting to come to fruition, and we thank the many people on the Council, at the Board of Education, within MCPS, and in the City of Gaithersburg who have listened to our pleas and are making the new Gaithersburg High School a priority. We need the Council to hold firm in its support and approve this CIP. Fully fund the Gaithersburg modernization, this year and through to its completion. Thank you.