

**Einstein Cluster
CIP testimony
presented to the County Council
February 6, 2008**

Good evening President Knapp and Members of the Council. I am Diane Dickson and I currently serve as Co-Cluster Coordinator for the Albert Einstein Cluster with Faye Nabavian.

First of all, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to speak to you on behalf of the children in our cluster, and also to thank you for your service and dedication to our community.

We'd like to start by acknowledging some areas of progress in our cluster that we are pleased with. This school year, seven years after the initial feasibility study, Einstein High School opened with the new Visual and Performing Arts addition completed and ready for student use. The first group to attend this academy as freshmen will be able to complete their final year as seniors in the new space.

Progress has also been made at the elementary school level with the opening of Arcola Elementary School which has relieved overcrowding at Highland Elementary School. This has been a great relief.

We remain concerned about overcrowding at Oakland Terrace Elementary School, which is more than 230 students over capacity with 7 trailer classrooms, and Rock View Elementary, which is 132 students overenrolled with 8 trailer classrooms. Thousands of our students have been attending schools with trailers for the entire duration of their schooling as plans to address the problems continue to be delayed or scaled down. The Superintendent's proposed CIP includes plans to re-open McKenney Hills Elementary to reduce overcrowding at Oakland Terrace and Woodlin Elementary Schools by 2012, while the addition of eight classrooms for Rock View Elementary would be slated for 2010. Unfortunately, the County Executive's plan could push these projects back considerably. Overcrowding will continue to get worse as enrollment increases in these schools.

I am here tonight with the hope of convincing you to increase the SAG (Spending Affordability Guidelines) via bonds in order to increase funding for these capital projects. I know I do not have to explain to you the importance of providing every student with a safe, secure, modern facility for learning. We recognize that this is a lean budget year and that we have many needs across the county in addition to the education of our children. But more than any other public institution in this county, MCPS, its' parents, volunteers and students, make contributions to the quality of life of all of our residents which far exceed the associated costs of running a world class school system. MCPS parents are consistently engaged in volunteer activities ranging from fundraising, to contributing manpower in classrooms and on playgrounds, to helping to inform the community on issues and advocating on behalf of our most impacted and our neediest members. Likewise, our students contribute thousands of volunteer hours to businesses, government agencies and non-profit as well as faith-based organizations. Furthermore, one of the prime features which attracts so many families to our county is our top-notch school system. This demand serves to increase property values, which benefits us all.

We come to you year after year, asking that these needed projects be funded. Year after year, projects are delayed while buildings continue to deteriorate. You have the difficult task of prioritizing and funding all of the needed building projects in the county. We do not envy you. Please bear in mind that funding school projects is an investment in the future of this great county.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify tonight and to share with you our cluster's concerns.