

Magruder Custer Testimony to the Montgomery County Council on February 6, 2008 concerning the Capital Improvement Plan

Let me first note the Magruder cluster's sadness over the death of Marilyn Praisner last week. As one of the clusters that make up her district, we mourn her passing and offer our condolences to her family, friends, and colleagues.

The Magruder cluster is aware of the difficult fiscal situation the county is in. We are also painfully aware of the tremendous capital improvement needs that exist in our school system. The fact that the budget is tight does not reduce the needs of our students now or down the road. We support the comments made earlier by Jane de Winter on behalf of MCCPTA.

We are pleased this year to be breaking ground on the renovation of Cashell Elementary School, the first serious construction in our cluster in quite some time.

We are concerned of talk in the air of delaying major construction projects, such as high school modernizations. While Magruder High School is not on the queue for modernization, it is not far over the horizon, and already parts of the school are showing their age.

But the number one priority this year is to address the situation at Redland Middle School.

Redland was built in 1971 during a period when open school plans were in fashion. In the late 1970s, partitions were put up in Redland that divided the open spaces into classrooms and hallways. However, this "solution" had several problems, which you heard about during testimony last night such as exposed ductwork, noise (and sometimes objects) traveling over walls, and students walking through one classroom to get to another.

For 30 years, the students at Redland have had to try and learn under these conditions.

In the last decade, the school system recognized the need to address the issues at Redland. Facility studies were completed and major improvements were recommended in the last several CIPs. Ceilings would be installed. New walls would be built. Narrow hallways would be reconfigured. The ventilation system would be completely replaced. Construction was scheduled to start this June.

But when this year's CIP came out, the community was shocked. The plan to refurbish the school would have cost about \$28 million. However, the Superintendent recommended spending less than a quarter of that amount. Through a massive effort on the part of the community, including an "Crimson Tide" at the Board of Education hearings in November, Dr. Weast and the Board of Education restored some, but not all of the money to the Redland construction project

While we are pleased with the plans for the front half of the school, it's still not clear how far the money allocated will take us in replacing and reconfiguring walls in the back half of the school. We find ourselves in a Catch-22 because we have been told that planning meetings should wait until funding is approved, but we cannot judge if the funding is adequate until the planning meetings take place. And as the June start date approaches we worry about possible delays or extra costs in the project.

While every dollar of the \$13 million being asked for is money well spent, the addition of even a small amount to ensure that things are done right here may pay huge dividends.

We are here tonight to make sure that Redland gets the funding it needs.

We are here tonight to make sure that you are as committed to the students of Redland as we are.

And we will be in Annapolis next week to make sure that our state leaders share our commitment as well.

For three decades, the Redland community has willingly played by the rules and the students and teachers have made-do in less than adequate conditions. We are weary of settling for less and are unwilling to wait any longer.

Thank you for your support.