

THE NORTHEAST CONSORTIUM
A Consortium of the Blake, Paint Branch and Springbrook Clusters

Comments on the FY 2009 Capital Budget

On behalf of The NEC High Schools

February 6, 2008

Blake High School
Paint Branch High School
Springbrook High School

Good evening President Knapp and members of the Montgomery County Council. My name is Patti Twigg and I am the Paint Branch Cluster Coordinator. I am here tonight to speak on behalf of the CIP needs of the three exceptional high schools in our Consortium — Blake, Paint Branch and Springbrook.

Your attention to some of the critical needs in the NEC over the past few years has been greatly appreciated by our community. Even the smallest of these changes makes a marked difference in the quality of our schools. Despite these improvements however, our high schools continue to suffer several critical needs. While the written testimony expresses the needs of all three schools, I will be focusing my oral testimony on what we consider to be the greatest need, the modernization of Paint Branch HS.

We are very appreciative that the BOE added money to begin the site work for Paint Branch High School's modernization, and that Mr. Leggett has recommended fully funding the BOE's FY09 request. However, I can state categorically that while we hesitantly understood and accepted a one year delay in construction this past fall, the possibility of an additional year's delay in the modernization of Paint Branch is totally unacceptable to the entire Northeast Consortium community. We have been delayed before, partially reinstated, and an additional year's delay puts us back to our original three year delay.

To us, this is a question of priorities. It is easy to target the largest project in the budget with delays, but is it the most cost effective? Construction is only going to get more expensive. While all our children are precious, our high school students are at a critical stage in their lives, where the choices they make can affect us all. The old adage of build more schools or build more prisons has stood the test of time. These students are our County's immediate future – they will be the doctors, teachers, police officers, fire fighters, and government leaders that will take us into the future.

Considering how the modernization date has historically been a moving target, how can the **Paint Branch, Gaithersburg, Seneca Valley and Wheaton** Communities be anything but fearful of further delays, especially in light of the fact that projections for funding for future years is increasingly dire? In addition, how can we be anything but fearful that our project could be scaled back, which is what happened when Blake HS was built, so that their gym and auditorium are inadequate for a school of their present size? We are all painfully aware of the fact that with each

year delay the cost of a modernized school rises, as does the likelihood of delays for high schools behind us in the modernization queue. What does not change is the need for Montgomery County students of all ages to be housed in safe, healthy, adequately sized school buildings. Our exceptional school system is what draws people to our county. If we allow our schools to fall behind, Montgomery County will no longer be the residence of choice.

Aging facilities such as Paint Branch present many challenges, among which is the difficulty recently experienced in obtaining replacement parts for our fire alarm system. In the almost 40 years since the school was built, the company who originally provided the system has since gone out of business. This made it necessary to fabricate parts that are no longer available on the market, and cost an untold amount of money, including a live “fire watch” patrol of the halls to allow the building to remain open for the almost two months until the parts could be made. It is not an unreasonable leap of logic to assume that problems such as this will continue to crop up.

Schools today are used for more than just educating children. Outside organizations utilize Paint Branch on a regular basis. There is something going on there 7 days a week, from the George B. Thomas Learning Academy on Saturday, church services on Sunday, school and community group meetings during the weekday evenings and the George B. Thomas After School Program, Montgomery County Recreation Department Sports Academy and MCPS High School Plus programs three afternoons a week, in addition to school athletic and extracurricular activities. The new school will benefit our entire community.

Education today is very different than when Paint Branch was built. It is currently over capacity, strictly from an average student per classroom point of view, but of course this does not reflect needs that go beyond that. The County does not offer an alternative high school, and so our high school educates all students, whatever their needs. This does place Paint Branch in the position of finding and creating space to accommodate these needs. The new school has been carefully designed and planned to compensate and correct for the problems with the current facility – three years and countless hours of work have been devoted to making sure the new facility will be able to serve our students for years to come.

Paint Branch is a majority-minority school. Our students are hard working and eager to perform well. But they require a modern facility to fulfill their twenty-first century educational needs.

Our Consortium is based on the concept of Choice, and in order for it to function to its full potential, we must have a level playing field. While all three high schools offer rigorous, comprehensive programs, from a facilities standpoint, Paint Branch is behind the eight ball. Blake was opened in 1998, Springbrook was renovated in 1994. Paint Branch was opened in 1969, with an addition constructed in 1987. We find ourselves in a unique situation, where we are the ugly duckling of the Consortium, awaiting our transformation into the beautiful swan we deserve to be. Without this renovation, Paint Branch is not an equal choice.

With this in mind, Paint Branch High School is requesting that the total appropriation for the construction project be maintained. We feel that doing so is in the best interest of the Paint Branch community, the Northeast Consortium community and all other high school modernizations scheduled in future years.

Paint Branch students have written letters expressing their views. These have been submitted along with the copies of my testimony.

Consequences of further delays in the construction of Paint Branch HS:

- Higher costs
- Crumbling infrastructure
- Unequal learning environment not only in the Northeast Consortium, but County-wide
- Community impact
- Hazardous environment

Thank you for your time and your consideration of these requests.

Respectfully,

The Northeast Consortium Cluster Coordinators

Area Vice President

Ellen Salins

Springbrook

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Paint Branch

Patti Twigg

Blake

Dawn Dolan

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Springbrook High School:

- Requests that it be one of the *first* schools considered for installation of artificial turf on its upper field should MCPS initiate this program. We have been making this request for years, and are extremely dismayed to read that other high schools in the county may get turf fields before we are even considered for one. Please see the attached letter for more information on this issue.
- Needs our TV Studio to be modernized. We are offering a state-of-the-art technology education to our students. However, the TV Studio is becoming outdated. We need to replace the outdated equipment with new equipment such as a new switcher and an updated recording system. Given that we house the Technology Signature Program, it seems only logical that our equipment remains state-of-the-art and functional.
- Needs outdoor security cameras – we have none. The 1994 renovation plans did not call for *any* security cameras. In addition, the total number of indoor cameras is inadequate. It is *imperative* that this be resolved.
- The bathrooms are in desperate need of renovation. Many of the fixtures are so old that replacement parts are no longer available. Their first floor bathrooms (which need to accommodate not only students but most visitors) are so unappealing as to reflect poorly on the school.
- Requests complete painting for the exterior and interior of the building. The building was last painted 13 years ago and really needs a completely new paint project.
- Seeks solar shades for the skylights in its main hallway and Media Center, which were never installed as part of its 1994 renovation plan. The heat generated through these skylights not only creates an uncomfortable school environment, but causes significant energy costs and wear on the computers.

James Hubert Blake High School:

- Is proud to celebrate its 10th Anniversary this year. We appreciate the new flooring in the outer lobbies and the patching of its staff parking area. However, we request that the school system continue its resolution to their athletic stadium, outdoor lighting, and outdoor security camera problems.
- A relocation of our football stadium has been suggested as a solution to the snake problem Blake is experiencing in the wooded area behind the goal posts and we fully support this action as soon as possible.
- We are in a wooded and secluded area and the front entrance lighting remains a safety and security issue, with barely enough light to see beyond the front walkway in the dark.
- We are a large campus, comprised of 93 acres, which is three times the size of most high school campuses, and the addition of outdoor security cameras remains a top priority.

- We are concerned about the maximization of our facility capacity and the further hardship that area development will place on its program. We request to be put on the CIP schedule to initiate a feasibility study for an addition and for an expansion of our gymnasium - which was less than capacity when it was originally built.
- Further, we still needs the make-shift science lab completed with lab stations. New carpeting is needed in the main office and media center, and there still remains an issue with cracked and separating floor tile throughout the building. Unfortunately, the newly patched staff parking lot has not weathered its repair, and the holes have again sunk leaving the parking lot puddled and potted.

Paint Branch High School:

- We appreciate the hallway floor tile replacement and parking lot re-painting done over the summer.

We respectfully request the urgent attention of the Board of Education to the deteriorating field situation at Springbrook High School. We request that the County investigate the feasibility of installing synthetic turf on Springbrook's multi-purpose upper field.

We want to go on record with a request that Springbrook and Bethesda-Chevy Chase high schools, with the smallest footprints among high schools in the county, be given priority consideration for the installation of synthetic turf. Because of the limited space, (they are the only high schools with only two fields), the physical education and athletic programs at these two schools operate at significant disadvantage.

MCPS undertakes extensive long term planning to assure high quality academic programs are available to all students. In this age of rampant obesity, we ask you to consider an important long-term investment in our students' *physical health*.

The installation of artificial turf on Springbrook's all-purpose upper field would be a smart investment—for reasons of safety, space requirements and finances. It would also contribute to greater resource equity among high schools in the Northeast Consortium.

1. **Safety:** We call your attention to serious safety concerns, as each day up to 100 athletes are forced to leave campus for practices and games. Field hockey, soccer and lacrosse teams walk or drive across busy New Hampshire Avenue or walk through wooded areas to reach these off-campus sites.
2. **Risk of Injury:** Field conditions pose an increased risk of injury due to constant overuse. During each school day, around 450 students share one woefully inadequate field for physical education. After school, an additional 120 athletes in the Fall and 60 in the Spring use the field for football and baseball practices. The County Recreation Department would like to add a Sports Academy to share the *same* field. Despite nearly heroic efforts by school staff to maintain these overused fields, the conditions pose serious risks of injury.
3. **Financial:** While other schools enjoy games at home with entry gate revenues, Springbrook must *pay* \$80/game to Park and Rec. for 'home games' on its fields, with no gate revenues allowed (ouch!); these games also see fewer spectators who are willing and able to walk or drive to the games.

We ask that the BOE consider the installation of artificial turf at Springbrook HS and at BCC HS as soon as possible.

At Springbrook, artificial turf on the upper all purpose field will produce several immediate benefits:

- Physical education classes will have access to quality turf, unencumbered by variations in the weather.
- The school will have continuous use for all practices and other after-school fitness activities daily from 2 to 9 pm.

- Our students (both athletes and spectators) could enjoy school sports in the safe environment of our high school grounds.
- In a reversal, the school could lease the fields to Park and Recreation for summer programs, benefiting the whole community.
- Beginning with the all-purpose field at Springbrook and the football field at BCC would provide some balance in the County, and an opportunity for the BOE to assess the costs-benefits, while providing needed relief to these two schools. Our neighboring counties have already understood the wisdom of such an investment: Arlington County has six school fields, with four more on line; Howard County, with three, has plans for several more.

We recognize that this is a large investment, but believe it is a wise long-term investment that will allow *more* students to be *more* active without leaving the *safety* of school grounds.