

Quince Orchard Cluster of Montgomery County Council of Parent Teacher Associations

Testimony before the Montgomery Council, Feb. 6 2008

President Knapp,
Members of the Council

On behalf of the students attending Montgomery County Public Schools in the Quince Orchard cluster, and their parents, I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of the Board of Education's FY 2009-2014 Capital Improvements Program.

Quince Orchard Cluster celebrates the latest capital improvements inside our boundaries. A new gym is open in Thurgood Marshall ES and the 10 room addition to Fields Road ES will be completed by the end of the school year. We acknowledge this body's previous commitments to education that has made these possible.

As we consider County Executive Leggett's recommendation for cuts in the Capital Improvements Program, focused on the later years, we worry for the future of the infrastructure that supports education standards in our cluster. The later years of the Board of Education's CIP promises to address real needs in our cluster.

Brown Station Elementary School

Brown Station ES is the oldest facility in our cluster and is in need of an overhaul. This facility has been in the program before, and passed over. We have watched in frustration as emphasis was instead placed on building new facilities. We consider renovation of Brown Station a top priority. The Executive's cuts will increase pressure on MCPS to delay, again, an overhaul for this aging facility.

Ridgeview Middle School

Corrections to Ridgeview MS are to be re-planned to address the highest priority problems of improper and inoperable ventilation, the lack of natural light, safety issues concerning stairwells, and for elimination of blind corners and narrow halls.

Ridgeview, originally built as an open-format school, without the appropriate infrastructure to support closed classrooms, was imperfectly reconfigured in the late 1980's and manages to function as a middle school only by extraordinary sacrifices from staff and administration.

The lack of proper ventilation, heating, and cooling definitely impact the morale of the school community, and diminish staff's ability to assure the highest levels of teaching, learning, and school programs.

Brown Station Elementary
Fields Road Elementary
Jones Lane Elementary
Rachel Carson Elementary
Thurgood Marshall Elementary

Lakelands Park Middle
Ridgeview Middle

Quince Orchard High

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These high priority problems at Ridgeview are only reluctantly acknowledged within MCPS. Ridgeview would not be scheduled for an official renovation until sometime in the 2020's, and Superintendent Weast's recommended 2009 CIP plan dropped support for their correction, a correction that was through planning and part of the 2007 CIP. The Board of Education has pressed MCPS to recognize these needs, but we worry that the Executive's cuts may make it all too convenient to delay or ignore needed corrections at Ridgeview.

Overcrowding at Rachel Carson Elementary School

Rachel Carson ES is projected to remain overcrowded for the foreseeable future. Relief for this problem was studied last year, but the 2009 CIP only partially addresses the problem by shuffling a 4 room ELC to another school in the cluster. Growth in this school has defied all attempts at projection by MCPS Long Range Planning, with enrollment that has exceeded projections year after year.

Requests for two more portables have been issued, bringing the total to eight. Blacktop area will be mostly occupied with portables. The Board of Education's 2009 CIP offers no outlook to the time when this school can be administered without 5 lunch periods, with its blacktop free of portables, and at its designed capacity. The Executive's cuts leave us in doubt that this issue will ever be addressed before today's kindergartners enter high school.

Parents in the Quince Orchard Cluster are aware of the gathering clouds on the economic horizon, and can appreciate that the Executive is acting from a sense of fiscal responsibility. We would like to respectfully assert that there are other methods of addressing the issues of funding deficit that are within the authority of the Council to adopt. We urge the Council to consider increasing the Spending Affordability Guidelines to fully fund the Board's CIP, and that this could be done responsibly by bond instruments rather than general revenue. The later years of the CIP could be funded and leave the County with an AAA rating. We believe borrowing to build is acceptable debt, and will serve the future of all residents.

We would like to thank the Council for the opportunity to speak tonight about CIP issues in Quince Orchard Cluster, and would like to especially thank them for their accommodations to the PTA schedules.
