

**Wheaton Cluster CIP Testimony
before the County Council
February 6, 2008**

Good evening. My name is Karen Smith, and I represent the Wheaton Cluster PTAs.

Two years ago, Superintendent Weast and the Board of Education announced an ambitious initiative to try to catch up to the CIP needs of our county's public schools, which had been ignored and neglected for several years running. I come here tonight to urge you to stay the course on this initiative, and support the CIP budget for the schools, as it stands. The Wheaton cluster is a microcosm of why this matters, county-wide.

For years, many of the CIP needs of the Wheaton cluster were ignored. Just a few years ago, we had a dilapidated, overcrowded, dispirited, and, yes, dysfunctional middle school. Now we have two new middle school buildings with innovative programs which are making a real difference in the lives of the students who attend school there. One of them, our performing arts middle school, is still in need of a performing arts space (otherwise known as an auditorium). Just a few years ago, our elementary schools had an average of 10.5 portables; we're now down to an average of 5.8. These spaces have been part and parcel of the improved academic results (and lower suspension rates) coming out of the Wheaton cluster. For a glimpse of how much more we have to do, I urge you to come out and visit Wheaton Woods (newly invigorated by a wonderful new principal, but still in an old building with a big, wide crack in the asphalt running straight across the playground).

Last year I came here bragging about the scholarship money brought in by Wheaton High School seniors through our highly successful academy program; this year I'm here to ask you to support the laboratory additions that are in this budget which will allow us extend these opportunities to the students who are already waiting in the queue for their turn.

I do understand that continuing to fund CIP "catch-up" may be a tall order this year, as the amount expected from State CIP funds is considerably greater than we have been given reason to expect from Annapolis. But as others have already pointed out, none of this gets less expensive if we put it off. And a good school system, a highly functional school system, helps us to turn out productive, contributing members of society. A good school system *is* an anti-crime initiative.

Next Monday evening, PTAs from all over the state are scheduled to go to Annapolis to lobby for education: let us know how we can help to bring more State CIP funds back to the county to continue this initiative.