

**Written Testimony of
Steve Augustino
On Behalf of the
Gaithersburg PTSA**

**Montgomery County Board of Education
Community Forum
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Good evening. Thank you for the opportunity to testify tonight. My name is Steve Augustino and I am pleased to testify on behalf of the Gaithersburg High School PTSA.

You have heard me speak many times about the severity of the need for a new building to replace Gaithersburg High School's crumbling 57-year old facility. I know you all agree with the statement that Dr. Weast made at one of your meetings last spring – that Gaithersburg's new building is "absolutely necessary and long overdue." To that, I (and the parents, teachers and students here with me tonight) say, "Amen."

Tonight, I'm here to explain why, in these difficult times, we must proceed with the high school modernizations on their original schedules. Some will say we can't afford these projects right now. I say we can't afford to fall further behind than we already are.

Gaithersburg's facility is like my 1997 Ford Explorer SUV. My 1997 Explorer is really showing its age. It has 140,000 miles on it, the driver's seat is uncomfortable, the paint is faded and there is a scratch on the side that I just never got around to fixing. Beautiful it is not. My Explorer doesn't have any of the technology that has become typical of the other cars in my neighborhood: no GPS, no input for my iPod, no side curtain airbags, no rear seat DVD, etc. It also is not as reliable as it was in the past – maintenance costs are high and unpredictable. It gets about 12 miles to the gallon, at \$4 per gallon, no less. And, to top it off, I have to pay for maintenance and gas from current revenues, so to speak.

In this climate, the smart choice is to ditch my gas guzzling SUV, sooner rather than later. The same conclusion holds with the high school modernizations. What you spend in capital budget will lead to significant savings in the operating budget.

- **Maintenance:** Gaithersburg High School had over 900 completed maintenance orders last year. Clarksburg High – the newest facility served by our depot – had only 274. How many classroom teachers could you keep if you reduced the maintenance burden by two-thirds at Paint Branch, Gaithersburg, Wheaton and Seneca Valley?
- **Heating and A/C cost:** Great Seneca Creek ES reports that "free" energy from the geothermal system saves the county 50 cents per

square foot per year. It also reports that it saves \$50,000 per year in utilities due to the white Energy Star roof. How much more Middle School technology could you purchase if you saved the same amounts at the next four high schools on the modernization list?

- **Water and Utilities:** Great Seneca Creek ES also reports that it reduced potable water usage by 43%. How many more outreach counselors, special ed teachers or elementary school assistant principals could you afford if you reduced water and other utility usage at the high schools left on your modernization list?

Finally and most importantly, there is one more reality you have to address in deciding whether you can afford to delay the modernizations even further. The high schools next on your modernization list are precisely the schools where you are trying to raise performance. The next four high schools on the modernization list rank 11th, 8th, 1st and 9th, respectively, in FARMS percentages in Montgomery County high schools. They rank 21st, 3rd, 1st and 7th, respectively, in ESOL percentages in Montgomery County high schools. At the same time, they were ranked by Newsweek Magazine as the 13th, 18th, 20th and 23rd highest achieving high schools of the 23 Montgomery County high schools that were ranked. And, the most recent “Schools at a Glance” data show that each of these four schools had average SAT scores that were below the County average and below the nationwide average. So, how can you “raise the bar and close the gap” when you handicap these students with your most inadequate facilities?

It is time to stop delaying and stop accepting excuses. In the last 10 years, you modernized the County’s top performing high schools. In these next 10 years, you must modernize your lowest performing schools. With apologies for the double negative to Ms. Kohn, my 12 grade MCPS English teacher, you can’t afford not to do it.