

Quince Orchard Cluster of Montgomery County Council of Parent Teacher Associations

November 13, 2008

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

Lakelands Park Middle
Ridgeview Middle

Quince Orchard High

Testimony before the Montgomery County Public Schools Board of Education Regarding the FY2010 Capital Budget and Amendments to the FY 2009 -2014 Capital Improvement Program

Dear President Navarro, Dr. Weast, and Members of the Board of Education,

It's a pleasure to meet with you tonight on behalf of the parents of more than 6,000 students attending public schools in the Quince Orchard Cluster to thank you for efforts on their behalf, and to support the Superintendent's FY2010 Capital Budget, and the amendments to the current CIP.

Quince Orchard Cluster has a lot to thank you for, including:

- The transformation of Fields Road Elementary School into a bright, uncrowded, and secure school; where the morale, attitudes and learning centers have been dramatically improved;
- The physical improvements to Quince Orchard High School, including the roof, the painting and improvements to the auditorium; and,
- Keeping Brown Station on schedule for its completed modernization in 2016.

We realize that the economy has had a sobering impact on our capital improvements, and while we support the MCCPTA position that "We can't afford to fall behind," we can't delude ourselves into thinking that the status quo is "OK."

In the Quince Orchard Cluster, we have a number of problems that we testify about year after year, and in spite of having high hopes of resolution they are dashed, year after year. Two of them are health and safety issues, and one of them is a severe case of overcrowding. Tonight we will discuss them, without unrealistic demands for funds, but rather requests for MCPS and Board action to bring us closer to a resolution in each case.

Rachel Carson Elementary School has a program capacity of 639 students and yet their current enrollment is 840 students. This is 201 students over capacity. They currently have seven portables, with room for no more. MCPS acknowledges the problem and worked two years ago for additions at two other schools to provide relief, but budgets tightened and the plans were dropped. In discussing the situation with the Planning Office, there is no long term solution being considered. For the sake of the students and staff, we would like the discussions to begin this year.

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For whatever reason, our Cluster has a number of pedestrian safety and Improved (Safe) Access to Schools issues. Brown Station Elementary School BSES has an accessibility problem that is becoming increasingly hazardous as traffic and school activities have increased. Currently the only student drop-off point is on Quince Orchard Blvd., which has high volumes of speeding traffic in the morning and afternoon. We would like some help in this area before someone is severely hurt.

Thurgood Marshall Elementary School has had safe access to schools problems that have been reported for at least the last five years. The biggest traffic safety problem is on school property, has been ignored, and is increasing as a safety problem due to traffic and a poorly designed parking lot entrance with insufficient capacity. The parking lot is very congested during pick up and drop-off periods and routinely backs up onto McDonald Chapel Road creating a traffic hazard. Three years ago during a CIP budget testimony (that included 12 pages of documentation), I highlighted this pedestrian safety issue. The Board of Education (BOE) raised concerns with MCPS and requested follow up information to address these problems. To date, nothing has been done to improve the situation. Two years ago, our hopes were high anticipating the problem would be solved with the planned addition to relieve Rachel Carson. When those plans were dropped, so was the solution; but the pedestrian safety problem remains. We would like this problem addressed before children are severely injured.

Finally, we have the third issue involving Ridgeview Middle School. If you recall, Ridgeview and Redland were scheduled for \$6 million in capital improvements. The Ridgeview community raised serious concerns that the improvements were not addressing the primary concern regarding the erratic HVAC system. The Board directed MCPS to meet with the community to identify the priorities and reach a viable solution. This was done over four community meetings in the Spring of this year. The HVAC system was the number one priority and plans were identified to request an additional \$6 million to cover the cost of seven additional priorities. These priorities were reported to MCPS in our Cluster comments last June.

The Ridgeview community was comfortable with its decision, and was awaiting the final report from the working group, when the new CIP publication was released and placed them in a state of shock. The improvement project went from a completion date of August, 2010 to "TBD." In essence, it "fell behind," and off the six year CIP table. We spoke to you, and you listened.

To your credit, you helped our community work with Joe LaVorgna and James Song on short notice to reach agreement on a plan to address our concerns. Currently we have nearly \$3.5 million for this year that is budgeted and doing "nothing." We would like to use a small portion of these funds to begin the design process including an expanded scope this year. Based on our agreement with Joe and James, we would like the scope of the design to include structural improvements similar to those provided to Redland MS. We recognize that the project itself will be considered as part of the FY2011-2016 CIP with an appropriate project budget. Your approval to begin the design process will give us a projected completion date of August, 2012. One or two years behind, but in sight and on the CIP table. Our Ridgeview students and staff will continue to deal with the HVAC problems, but with renewed support from our facilities management staff.

As always, we greatly appreciate your support and the hard work you do for all Montgomery County students. We know it is a tough year, and we'll do what we can to secure both County and State

financial support. There are many parents here tonight, and many more watching at home; each concerned for their children's welfare. We thank you for looking out for them!

Sincerely yours,

Jim Keenan
Quince Orchard Cluster Coordinator
