

Walter Johnson Cluster PTAs

Walter Johnson High School__North Bethesda Middle School__Tilden Middle School__Ashburton Elementary School__Farmland Elementary School__Garrett Park Elementary School__Kensington Parkwood Elementary School__Luxmanor Elementary School__Wyngate Elementary School

Testimony to the Board of Education on the Superintendent's Recommended FY 2009 Capital Budget and the FY 2009-2014 CIP November 15, 2007

Good Evening President Navarro, members of the Board of Education and Superintendent Weast. My name is Elizabeth Sadove and I am a Walter Johnson Cluster Coordinator with Pam Moomau and Joanne Vanderhorst.

The Walter Johnson Cluster PTAs support the Superintendent's Recommended FY 2009-2014 Capital Improvements Program. We also support the Montgomery County Council of PTA's objective to ensure that MCPS provides appropriate learning facilities to meet the needs of our students for safe, secure and modern classrooms.

Because Walter Johnson schools are old and in a Smart Growth area, our cluster has had many capital projects in recent years, and is in need of many more. We appreciate the investments MCPS had made in modernizations and additions in our cluster in recent years and look forward to more of both in the upcoming years.

We thank the Board of Education for their efforts to address the long standing overcrowding and antiquated condition of the school facilities in our cluster. We are most appreciative of the wonderful, state-of-the-art auditorium at Walter Johnson HS. It is a continual reminder of the pay-off that we will receive from WJ's ongoing construction. We also are very appreciative of the modernized facility at Kensington-Parkwood ES; the timely completion of the new addition and gym at Farmland ES and the new addition at Garrett Park ES.

As you know, Walter Johnson HS is in the midst of one of the most intense phases of its 13-year on site modernization project. So far the weather has cooperated beautifully and with the help of neighboring schools that have absorbed many of WJ-facility needs, our students have mastered (and may even take a bit of pride in) their portable city. We are encouraged that the recommendations appear to fully fund WJ's modernization to achieve completion, as scheduled, by August 2010. In addition, we are pleased that Luxmanor ES and Ashburton ES are scheduled to have new additions completed by August 2008. We note, however, that Luxmanor ES's addition has yet to start because of delays in obtaining a construction permit.

Finally, we were pleased to see that the CIP budget recommends funding for modernizations at most of the remaining needy WJ cluster schools. Farmland ES is scheduled for completion in August 2011; Garrett Park ES's modernization includes a gym and is scheduled for completion in January 2012. Luxmanor ES is scheduled for completion in January 2018; and Tilden MS is scheduled for completion in August 2017. In addition, a feasibility study for an addition at Wyngate ES is projected to be started in FY 09. We encourage scheduling a date for construction of the addition as soon as possible, as Wyngate continues to exceed capacity expectations.

In addition, those schools that have not been assessed, for purposes of being added to the modernization list, should be assessed. For example, Rock Terrace, which is affiliated administratively with our cluster, was built in 1950, a decade before most of the schools currently on the list, but it does not yet have a FACT score.

We cannot emphasize strongly enough how important it is to maintain this modernization schedule. We had hoped that Farmland ES's and Garrett Park ES's completion dates might be accelerated to take advantage of available holding schools. Previous delays in the modernization schedule resulted in the illogical situation at Farmland ES and Garrett Park ES, whereby additions were completed just several years before students are scheduled to transfer to holding schools while they are modernized. If there is holding school availability, we hope MCPS has the foresight to avoid repeating these missed opportunities in other situations. We hope that Luxmanor ES does not become another example.

We would like to highlight both our eager anticipation of upcoming modernizations and the completion of Walter Johnson HS's modernization project. In so doing, we would like to emphasize our expectation that MCPS exercise more planning and supervision during construction and commissioning of these buildings in order to prevent problems in newly opened buildings. We urge that adequate construction money be allocated to health, safety, and commissioning issues in all the school projects slated for our cluster. There are several unfixed capital projects that are necessary to remedy problems directly resulting from recent construction projects.

First, at Kensington Parkwood ES there are several major landscaping-related problems that were created as a result of the modernization project. One problem was the creation of an enormous hill along the street by the lower entrance of the school, which poses a safety hazard for children. A second concern is that the field behind the school has a serious drainage problem and it immediately floods with very little rain. It has no grass, so when dry, it is a dust bowl.

Second, at Farmland a major safety issue that remains unresolved relates to traffic and the configuration of a new drop-off circle that was part of the recent construction. A modification to the construction plan required the addition of a drainage pond. The plan

failed to include a side walk that leads from the street to the school, forcing children to cross in front of cars at the car drop-off circle. This has resulted in a few near miss accidents. During the construction phase, parents identified the problem, brought it to the attention of the identified, proper construction-related authorities; nonetheless, the problem was not addressed during the renovation process. Remedy of this situation cannot wait until the scheduled modernization.

It is our sincere hope that as we embark on more of these major construction projects, that MCPS sets aside, as part of the initial construction budget, funds to deal with the inevitable problems that arise as a result of construction. In the non-MCPS world, those of us that have dealt with major home renovations, anticipate inevitable problems and build in a percentage within the budget to remedy them. MCPS should build in a buffer for these types of expenses so that, when, not if, problems arise, they can be fixed within the first 6 months of project completion, especially if safety hazards are created. We shouldn't have to wait several years.

Finally, the Walter Johnson cluster schools that have successfully navigated the capital improvement modernization and/or addition odyssey remain at or over capacity. Again, we would like to emphasize our expectation that MCPS exercise more planning to attempt to accommodate the obvious development and growth in the cluster. The modernization cycle is an estimated 50-70 years. Wouldn't it make sense to anticipate growth and modernize slightly overcapacity?

As noted, the area around Walter Johnson is slated for increased development. It is our understanding that revisions to the White Flint Sector Master Plan recommend substantially more development than even originally considered; and that within the context of increased density, there is consideration being given to the possibility of a new Walter Johnson cluster elementary school. We remain very concerned about increased density and the impact growth demands will have on school capacity. We will be closely watching these developments.

Meanwhile, as several of our schools await modernization, the list of necessary capital improvements grows. While we are encouraged that our schools are slated for modernization, some of the completion dates are ten years off. We hope to see major increases in crucial countywide capital projects.

MCPS continues to relegate what should be capital projects to maintenance, and then fails to provide the maintenance. Addressing problems relating to HVAC systems seems to be a persistent example in our cluster. At Kensington Parkwood ES, incorrect initial installation of the HVAC system resulted in numerous calls to "fix" air conditioning and heat, resulting in serious leaking issues, that took a couple of years to fully resolve. At both Farmland ES and Garrett Park ES repeated, semi-successful attempts to repair boilers and HVAC controls, rather than replace them, resulted in heating systems failing, causing weeks without

heat last winter. In addition, at Garrett Park ES, the kitchen facility lacks air conditioning—on warm days, the temperature far exceeds guidelines for county properties. At North Bethesda MS heating coils burst in the winter of 2006-07, which created flooding in some 20 classrooms. Although immediate repairs were made, we are concerned for the overall integrity of the HVAC system and have requested that it be assessed.

Finally, Tilden MS's HVAC system has been awaiting upgrades and/or replacement for three years. Although repairs were listed in the CIP budget for this past summer and the building was closed for restroom renovations, the work was not done because the cost exceeded budget expectations. Meanwhile, several times a winter, the Tilden boiler malfunctions and the school is left without heat. We view this as a health and safety issue, which should put it at the top of your priority list. We urge you to provide adequate funds to fix the system in the FY 09 budget, so that it can be completed this summer. Similarly, failure to repair roof and plumbing leaks in a timely manner, in the past, has created major mold remediation issues at Garrett Park ES, which continues to experience leaks during heavy rains.

We are grateful for recent PLAR projects and restroom renovations. Luxmanor ES's and Tilden MS's restrooms were renovated this past summer. Tilden MS's black tops were repaved and the stage lights, currently condemned, are scheduled for replacement in the near future. All of these projects are helping to make the school a more inviting place for children. We request additional support for those schools that are slated for modernization several years out, and therefore, must limp along with the old restroom facilities. At Farmland ES and Garrett Park ES, the bathrooms in the core building are so old, they cannot be sufficiently cleaned. Tilden MS also needs a new school-wide PA system, new lockers, repairs to broken tiles in the stairwells, painting, and the playing fields need to be reconditioned. At Farmland ES, the school has to pay for water coolers to compensate for 15 broken water fountains, an expense for which MCPS has denied reimbursement. And MCPS new technology cannot be used because of inadequate electrical outlets in the classrooms.

We also support additional funding to address security problems and to address other facility issues that present fire code violations or violate ADA requirements. Kensington Parkwood ES, for example, requests installation of extra lighting and fencing behind the school to discourage vandalism. As another example, Tilden MS has an elevator that is non-functional and unsafe, as students, equipment and staff could become trapped. This requires maintenance to be ADA-compliant.

Thank you for your attention to our facility concerns and we look forward to working with you over the next fiscal year.