

Watkins Mill Cluster

Watkins Mill High School.
Montgomery Village Middle School; Neelsville Middle School
South Lake Elementary School; Stedwick Elementary School; Watkins Mill Elementary School;
Whetstone Elementary School

FY2009 Capital Budget and FY2009-2014 Capital Improvements Program Testimony

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Testimony presented by:
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Good evening President Navarro, Dr. Weast and members of the Board of Education. My name is Susan Young and I am one of the co-coordinators for the Watkins Mill Cluster. I am also the PTSA President at Montgomery Village Middle School.

On behalf of the families of the Watkins Mill Cluster we offer our sincere thanks for the classroom addition under construction at Stedwick Elementary School. Over capacity, with significant FARM and Mobility rates, the new classrooms were sorely needed and will be gratefully appreciated.

Although not specifically a CIP issue, I bring a heartfelt thank you from the parents, staff and students at Montgomery Village Middle School for your decision to improve middle school in this county. We appreciate your allowing MVMS to serve as a pilot site for the first phase of Middle School Reform. MVMS is thriving, and, as I will describe later, we have big plans in mind for the future.

So thank you and thank you. We do, of course, have some additional comments.

Whetstone Elementary School Classroom Addition: For starters, we *support the Superintendent's recommendation for a classroom addition at Whetstone Elementary School, with a goal of completing construction of the addition by August 2011.*

Neelsville Restroom Renovations: We also *support the recommended bathroom renovations at Neelsville Middle School.* In addition, other priority requests are for quick replacement of aging and worn out carpet and lockers at Neelsville, and installation of security cameras near the lockers.

County-wide Projects: We also support funding for County-wide projects that improve the quality, safety and health of the school facilities. The needs are numerous and varied. A key need in our cluster, and across many County schools, is additional funding to fix and/or renovate the plumbing and bathrooms. Watkins Mill High School is in desperate need of such work both for the student and faculty facilities. Other schools in our cluster are already on the Restroom Renovations Schedule and we seek to ensure they too are addressed as soon as possible. There is only so much a good building services team can do to hold these older facilities together.

It has been an interesting year for our cluster, to say the least, in terms of the Capital Improvements Program. The year began with our cluster looking forward to a brand new middle school. The purpose of this new school was to allow Neelsville MS to be completely turned over to the burgeoning Clarksburg Cluster. This would have provided Clarksburg needed capacity for 300-400 more students and provided numerous positive benefits to the Watkins Mill Cluster.

For example, location of this new school within Montgomery Village was especially exciting for the families and children who attend South Lake ES. Currently these children are bused to Neelsville MS (quite some distance away). For many of their families, reliance on public transportation makes getting to Neelsville MS a real challenge. This new school would have greatly improved parent access for a community that is stretched geographically across Montgomery Village. Improving parent access and involvement are especially crucial to a school where 62 percent of kids qualify for free or reduced meals, 33 percent are ESOL students, and there is a 42 percent mobility rate.

The prospect of this new school was also important to families whose children attend Stedwick Elementary School. Since Neelsville MS opened, Stedwick kids have faced split articulation to middle school, and a *second* split articulation back to high school. Enabling these kids to stay together as they progress through their careers as MCPS students can have many positive academic and social benefits.

These expectations and hopes were shaken as Watkins Mill Middle School #2 vanished from the CIP. Yet we strongly believe the needs just mentioned have not vanished.

Like many existing communities, Montgomery Village has experienced significant turnover these last several years. Many retirees and empty nesters have sold their homes and moved away, while many new families have moved into the area. The cluster's numbers for FARM, ESOL, and Mobility Rates reflect another critical dimension of the data beyond simply looking at total numbers. And, despite popular belief, Montgomery Village's Town Sector Zone still does include additional housing capacity.

If the long planned Watkins Mill MS #2 has really been lost to another cluster, then, from a CIP perspective, ***we ask the Board to study the feasibility of an addition to Montgomery Village Middle School.***

An addition could accommodate all students from our four cluster elementary schools, allowing all parents in the cluster the best possible access to their children's middle school.

An addition would enable Neelsville MS to wholly serve the Clarksburg Cluster as originally intended, providing population relief akin to what Watkins Mill HS received when we fully supported and advocated for the early opening of Clarksburg HS.

And an addition could provide all students in our cluster with access to an International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years Program. No, Montgomery Village MS does not currently have a Middle Years Programme. However, Watkins Mill HS is now in its fourth year as home to an IB Diploma Programme. We feel strongly the next logical step is to bring the IB Middle Years Programme to MVMS. We'll be back in January to talk about it.

In the spirit of being careful what we ask for, we do recognize there are several potential challenges associated with a 1000-student middle school. For example, it would be *absolutely*

imperative that MVMS receive adequate staffing—in administration, in guidance and in the classroom—for such a large and highly impacted student population as ours. We look forward to exploring this and other issues as a community during a feasibility study, which we hope can be included in this CIP.

Our cluster faces many challenges, yet, has much positive going for it today. We have welcomed several new principals to our cluster and see them as continuing to work well together. Our requested Capital and Countywide projects can help ensure this work takes place in a positive and supportive environment, one conducive to good learning. We ask that as you balance across the many competing needs, you continue to support those of our growing and diverse community. Thank you.