

Capital Improvement Project (CIP) 2008 Testimony

Wheaton Cluster

Good evening, members of the Board and Superintendent Weast. My name is Grace Ibanez-Barnes and along with Chris Zawlocki we are here representing the parents that make up the PTAs of the Wheaton Cluster. Two years ago, Superintendent Weast and the Board of Education announced an ambitious initiative to try to catch up with the CIP needs of our cluster which had been delayed and neglected for several years. As a result of that initiative, students at Parkland Middle and Sargent Shriver Elementary and, to some degree, A. Mario Loiederman Middle enjoy new buildings and/or renovations that include modern, safe, and secure facilities conducive to learning and that allow implementation of the special programs they offer. Parents understand the economic constraints facing the state and county, but they also realize the importance of educating their children in environments favorable to learning and improved performance. The schools we list below are in dire need to be renovated or modernized – we cannot fall behind in these efforts. At this time we submit the following schools for your consideration.

Veirs Mill Elementary (1950/1991 modernization) needs an addition to the current building. The school has 11 portable classrooms; more than 100 students attend classes in portables that are a safety concern and a maintenance problem. A new program was added to the school by the Central Office (PEP) prekindergarten special education program which expands every year. This extra project/program creates an additional strain on the facility. A proposal for the addition and feasibility study is scheduled for this school year and we hope is not postponed. Please, we cannot afford to fall behind on this project.

Wheaton Woods Elementary (1952/1976 modernization) is one the oldest buildings in the cluster and currently has five portable classrooms. We are requesting that the school be modernized. It was reported by a PTA representative that the sound system in the school does not work adequately. The sound breaks up and messages cannot be understood. This means that in case of an emergency, students and staff will not hear the message clearly. The portable classrooms cause security and maintenance concerns. Also, the playground area and equipment needs to be completely renovated. Please, we cannot afford to fall behind on this project.

Loiederman Middle School (1956/2005 last modernization) requests a feasibility study for a black box theatre/dance studio/storage space addition. Ideally, we would like an auditorium, but we feel that this addition would be a sufficient compromise to offer a quality performing arts program. This year the school is teaching 12 dance classes with a single dance studio. Six classes are currently being taught on the stage (at the end of the gym) which is a shared space with our physical education department.

Harmony Hills Elementary & Brookhaven Elementary are agreeable to delaying the completion date for their school addition projects for 6 months/1 year as long as the additional classrooms requested are included in their school addition projects. Both schools needed more classrooms to be added to the original project due to greater than anticipated enrollments. Harmony Hills Elementary currently has 8 portables and Brookhaven Elementary has 12.

Wheaton High School (1954/1983 last modernization) was built in 1954 and was modernized in 1983. In the last modernization, the plumbing was not replaced and as a result 1954 pipes are still in place in the school. The roof top units are “band-aided” together. These are 60 years old and if the heat or air conditioning fails we will not have a building to use until it is re-piped. The entire HVAC system is precarious and living on life support so to speak. Another aspect of our concerns related to the building’s failing and temperamental heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems is that they are affecting our computer labs. Computer labs on the school’s third floor operate slowly in the incredibly hot classrooms in which they are used. Computer labs on the school’s basement level must endure very cold temperatures, fall, winter, or spring. In the age of the diversification of information resources, students have become very accustomed to- and also dependent upon- access to the internet and several technological learning aids. This year’s implementation of the Promethean Boards is a typical example. Severe temperature changes are not conducive for learning and may eventually cause serious damage to this valuable equipment. Other concerns are the overall deterioration of concrete work, sidewalks, stairs, mortar and joints. Exterior and interior doors, old frames, hardware, hinges rusting and dilapidated as evidenced by the photographs that accompany this document. The lighting all over the school is old; old fixtures, frames, and yellowed light covers which are not eco-friendly.

The need for a better facility at Wheaton High School is extremely high. An incredibly diverse population, Wheaton High School’s Racial/Ethnic Composition is: 24% African American, 12% Asian American, 11% Caucasian, and 54% Hispanic. Nearly 10% of our students are in Special Education programs, 16% are enrolled in ESOL, and 47.7% of our students apply for Free and Reduced Meals, the highest FARMS rate in Montgomery County Public Schools. At Wheaton High School, the high percentage of ESOL students, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and the bilingual nature of our multicultural community all contribute to increased need for academic support. The first step toward closing the achievement gap must be to complete facility renovation.

We realize that renovation is a time-intensive project that may require years of work to complete. Our concerns extend past this current need and towards the future generations of Wheaton High School students and parents and to the community as a whole.

