

Montgomery County Board of Education
FY 2009 Capital Budget and the
FY 2009 – 2014 Capital Improvements Program
Whitman Cluster
November 15, 2007

Good evening, President Navarro, Members of the School Board and Dr. Weast. I am Paula Robinson, representing the Whitman Cluster. We appreciate this opportunity to testify on the FY 2009 Capital Budget and the 2009-2014 Capital Improvements Program.

The Whitman Cluster supports the 2009-2014 CIP. We continue to be grateful to the Board and the Superintendent for the leadership you have shown in addressing the most pressing construction needs in schools across the County. We all agree that excellence in learning requires excellent learning facilities.

We first want to thank you and the Superintendent for some recent construction that has occurred since we testified last year. In particular, our cluster is thrilled that the long awaited gym has finally been completed at Burning Tree Elementary School, and we thank you for making elementary school gym construction a priority. The Pyle Middle School Community, moreover, is extremely pleased that their long awaited addition began as scheduled this year. We eagerly look forward to its scheduled completion in August 2008.

We are also pleased that the CIP includes proposals for necessary future construction. We want to emphasize that Carderock Springs Elementary School is anxiously awaiting its modernization, including the addition of a gym, scheduled for completion in 2010. Originally built in 1966, this will be the building's first modernization in 44 years. We have previously testified on numerous occasions as to the inadequate condition of the building and the critical space shortages. Suffice it to say that this modernization is long, long overdue and must remain on track in order to provide staff and students with an effective learning environment and adequate program space.

In addition, we appreciate the responsiveness of the Superintendent and the Office of Long Range Planning to community concerns in the proposed CIP. At the CIP meetings this summer, and at the Community Forums this fall, the Whitman Cluster, as well as clusters across the County, pointed out that many of the restrooms in some of the older schools, such as Bannockburn, that were "modernized" in the 1980s are deteriorating rapidly. Those 1980s "modernizations" were not modernizations in the sense that schools are modernized today. Specifically, many of the bathrooms were untouched leaving the original 1950s plumbing, tiles, and fixtures in place. Despite repeated maintenance, the sinks don't work and toilets are unstable. Consequently, many students do not use the bathrooms at all during school hours. These bathrooms were never assessed for restroom renovations because those schools were supposedly modernized. After raising this issue, we are pleased to see that money has been requested to assess additional schools for restroom renovations. We appreciate having our concerns listened to and incorporated into the proposed budget.

A similar concern on a larger scale, however, remains to be addressed. Schools renovated in the 1980s never received FACT scores and thus, cannot be considered again for modernization even though, as we mentioned earlier, the standards for modernization in the 1980s were not as they are today. In particular, our cluster has watched the aging of Bradley Hills Elementary School with trepidation and continues to be concerned about it. The school was originally built

over 60 years ago and was renovated in 1984. Bradley Hills is the seventh smallest, and one of the oldest, elementary schools in the county. It is challenged by significant over-utilization, with capacity projections approaching 140%. They have outgrown their core and classroom space. In fact, their reading initiative teacher instructs her classes on the stage, and the instrumental music teacher teaches from a cart. We urge that Bradley Hills, and all the other buildings in the county without FACT scores, be evaluated for modernization and that these buildings be added to the construction schedule. We believe planning for construction needs should be a constant cycle, and we urge that Bradley Hills and other buildings not yet part of that cycle be added to it.

And while we applaud Dr. Weast's initiative to reduce the number of portables by building classroom additions, such as is proposed for Bradley Hills, we urge that portables not be removed prematurely from schools such as Wood Acres that have a need for them and are putting them to good use.

Finally, as we have in past years, we urge that routine building maintenance continues to be addressed. Although we recognize that this is also an operating budget issue, we urge that maintenance be a priority. Bathrooms, heating and air conditioning, playground blacktops, and lead in the pipes, all of these problems need to be addressed, not just in our cluster, but in the entire county. To learn, every child needs to attend school in a safe, secure and modern facility.

We recognize your support of our schools' construction needs and we, in turn, pledge to work with you to ensure that our county and state legislators appropriate the funds necessary to make this CIP a reality.

Thank you and good evening.