

MCCPTA
Testimony on the
FY 08 Capital Budget and
Amendments to the FY 2007-2012 Capital Improvements Program
May 1, 2007

Good evening, President Praisner, and Members of the County Council. I am Jane de Winter, MCCPTA President, advocating for each of the 138, 000 MCPS students to attend school in a safe, secure and modern facility. This evening I will discuss how we can plan for “safe, secure, and modern” to be the standard for all of our 199 facilities, while our cluster coordinators will talk about their individual school needs. We appreciate the opportunity to focus on our school buildings -- both to highlight immediate concerns of deteriorating and overcrowded facilities, and to significantly improve long-range facility planning and we thank you for allowing all of our clusters to testify in an amendment year.

MCCPTA supports the Superintendent’s Recommended FY2008 Capital Budget and Amendments to the FY 2007-2012 Capital Improvements Program. This ambitious CIP continues to build additions, modernize schools, and provide much-needed repairs and replacements to many of our outdated and overworked physical plants. We are gratified that our previous testimony for larger construction budgets has produced positive results with your support. We ask you now to keep this CIP on schedule and fully funded. We recognize that to do this there must be a large capital investment from both the County and the State. We urge you to use all State funds allocated to capital projects for school construction. We’ve heard that State aid will likely be lower in the future but will continue to ask our State legislators to invest in our schools. We also request that you begin to look for other revenue sources locally, as the dedicated Recordation and Schools Impact taxes have not come in as once projected.

MCCPTA believes that “a great classroom for every teacher” means setting a standard for all instructional space. Every child and teacher should be in a classroom that is secure; with adequate program space; where appropriate technology is available; and where air quality is good and the water safe to drink. We want safe access to our school buildings and parking lots. We believe that portables must not be a long-term solution and that we should reduce the number of children attending classes in these relocatables. We want all of our schools to have adequate and modern restrooms. And as a community, we must do more to ensure pedestrian safety.

In this amendment year, we think it is critical to focus on long-range planning. While it was exciting to open five new schools this fall for a total of eight new schools in the last three years, we have only completed four modernizations in the same three year period and none last year. Looking beyond the short term plan for more additions, the modernization schedule is both too long and too slow. And we are concerned that the current 48-year elementary, 76-year middle school, and 50-year high school modernization schedules makes it impossible to properly plan for school construction and life-cycle replacements. We want the remaining schools to be assessed and prioritized for placement on a modernization schedule. We want to see a rubric for adding permanent capacity to schools.

We are concerned that the one-to-six-year backlog of maintenance projects, totaling \$40-50 million for repairs and replacements (per MCPS Maintenance Department Director, Roy Higgins), means barely replacing major systems when needed, and leaves a minimum of funds for preventive maintenance in the budget., Unfortunately, as modernizations have been postponed, schools end up with band-aid repairs far too long and far too often. We support additional focus

and funds for maintenance projects, maintenance staff to repair and replace a multitude of systems and for preventative maintenance projects in both the capital and operating budgets.

We support long-range facility planning that involves you, the community, MCPS and us. We understand the other forces driving the capital budget including the short-term need for seats, the desire to reduce the number of portables, MCPS' capacity to build or repair projects within a given time frame, and the realities of fiscal constraints; but we must begin to look at the whole picture and plan for the long-term.

In order to do so, we think that there are a number of critical questions that must be asked, studied, and answered. We look forward to working with Mike Knapp on a task force that we proposed last fall on substantive long-range facility planning.

In closing, we appreciate the opportunity to raise these issues, and welcome future dialogue. We need to continue to build permanent space for our large school system, to ensure that every facility meets the standard with modernizations and timely repairs; we need to develop a feasible plan for future facility needs, and we must make a plan to reduce the backlog of maintenance projects. We urge you to use this amendment year for long-range planning with the community and MCPS. Together we must plan so that every child will attend school in a safe, secure, modern facility. Let's leave a legacy of buildings and a long-range plan that addresses the needs for every child now and in the future.