

**Montgomery County Council
FY 2012 Capital Budget and the
Amendments to the FY 2011-2016 Capital Improvements Program**

**Whitman Cluster
February 8, 2011**

Good evening Members of the County Council. I am Keith Parsky, and together with Jean Schlesinger and Deborah Goldman, we represent the Whitman Cluster. We value this opportunity to testify on the FY 2012 Capital Budget and the Capital Improvements Program recognizing that it was this Council's foresight in the past that brought excellence to our schools. Our success has come at a cost. Now, we are at a crossroads. In short, most of the Whitman Cluster's schools and many throughout the County are bursting at the seams. There is no doubt that our County needs construction dollars to continue delivering excellence. With fierce competition driving bids lower and today's low cost of money, we must now seize the opportunity to (1) increase system-wide renewal projects, (2) address severe overcrowding in our schools and (3) keep planned additions and modernizations on track. The savings we can realize now will allow our County to take "maximum advantage" of a down construction market.

Unfortunately, we are already playing "construction catch up," and we simply can't afford to fall further behind. We urge you to fund the proposed budget.

Bradley Hills Elementary School is extraordinarily grateful for our Superintendent's recommendation for a FY 2012 appropriation to begin

construction of classroom additions, scheduled for completion in August 2013. We and the Bradley Hills community hope to make this badly needed addition a reality. The exponential enrollment growth at Bradley Hills in recent years, coupled with the further increase that will result from the Bethesda Elementary boundary shift, will place Bradley Hills at nearly TWO HUNDRED PERCENT of the school's original intended capacity.

As a Cluster, we cautiously supported the boundary shift from Bethesda Elementary School to Bradley Hills Elementary School, because we firmly believe that straight articulation fosters community spirit and growth. Bradley Hills, however, is one of the County's oldest schools which has never been truly modernized, and has the smallest (or one of the smallest) APRs in the County. This addition, which was necessary even without the increases in student population resulting from the boundary shift, is now **essential**.

Expansion of the core spaces at Bradley Hills, including the APR, is critical not only to comply with fire safety codes, but also to provide the requisite functional space for 600 plus students. Given that the building must be closed and the students moved to a holding facility for one and a half years, this surely is the right time – and likely the **ONLY** time to undertake this work.

Overcrowding has also become a serious problem at Wood Acres Elementary School. Enrollment is at 134% capacity, and Wood Acres currently has five portables. Projections for Wood Acres indicate that enrollment will continue

to significantly exceed capacity. Because of the significant over-enrollment at Wood Acres, specialists in music, P.E., art, and ESOL are forced to share small rooms, use the cafeteria, and work on carts. Like most overcrowded schools in the County, the lunch period has been extended from 10:45 a.m. to 1:45 p.m., so as to safely fit all the students into the cafeteria.

The Superintendent has recommended that capacity studies be conducted to determine the feasibility of constructing classroom and core space additions at Wood Acres. However, due to site and facility constraints at Wood Acres, the Superintendent has recommended that capacity studies also be conducted to determine the feasibility of constructing classroom and core space additions at nearby Bannockburn Elementary School. We are hopeful that an approved addition at Wood Acres will be considered feasible to accommodate its growing population.

Without an addition at Wood Acres, any solution which doubles the student population at Bannockburn, without adequately preparing the school for such a large increase in students, is compounded by our concern about which schools were actually “modernized.” MCPS draws no distinction between schools built before 1970 and supposedly modernized and those schools newly built. Bannockburn and Burning Tree Elementary Schools were built in 1956 but supposedly “modernized” in the late 1980s. Schools built in 1985 are far more likely to be in decent shape than Bannockburn and Burning Tree.

We are a Cluster with one middle school: Thomas W. Pyle Middle School has the highest enrollment of any middle school in the County. Pyle has just one gym, and with approximately 180-210 students taking physical education each period, the space available for PE is not safe or adequate. In order to reduce overcrowding in the gym and lessen the chance for injury, the P.E. teachers (staffing levels permitting) are forced to make use of other space in the building, such as the cafeteria when it is available. The overcrowding in the gym has led to some injuries, fortunately minor in nature so far, and has led to significant frustration on the part of the P.E. teachers because they cannot teach lessons suited for the students due to the space constraints. In the interest of safety, we ask that you add whatever limited funding would be needed to this CIP to allow for planning and drawings for a new gym, so that funding for actual construction could be included in next year's CIP.

We recognize your continued support of our schools' construction needs and hope that you will take maximum advantage of the favorable construction market. We, in turn, pledge to continue working with you to ensure that our Governor and State legislators appropriate the funds necessary to make this CIP a reality. Remember, if you increase your support for education, the educated will increase their support for you.