

THE NORTHEAST CONSORTIUM

A Consortium of the Blake, Paint Branch and Springbrook Clusters

Comments on the FY 2010 Capital Budget and Amendments to the FY 2009-2014
Capital Improvements Program

On behalf of The NEC High Schools

February 10, 2009

Blake High School
Paint Branch High School
Springbrook High School

Good evening President Andrews and members of the County Council. My name is Patti Twigg and I am the Paint Branch Cluster Coordinator. I am here tonight to speak on behalf of the CIP needs of the three high schools in our Northeast Consortium — Blake, Paint Branch and Springbrook. While my written testimony includes all three schools, I will focus my oral testimony on what we consider to be our greatest need, the modernization of Paint Branch HS.

Your attention to some of the critical needs in the NEC over the past few years has been greatly appreciated by our community. Even the smallest of these changes makes a marked difference in the quality of our schools. Despite these improvements however, our high schools continue to suffer key needs.

I am heartened by President Obama's recognition of the urgent need for work on the infrastructure of our nation, including our schools. Nonetheless, we all know the realities of the budget and economy. We know that we live in tight budgetary times. However, we also cannot afford to fall behind in our CIP projects. Each year's delay only increases the cost, in dollars, but more importantly, in the impact on our students and their achievement and learning. We have all seen the graphs of the birthrate and the expected elementary school enrollment "bubble." But I submit to you that by focusing resources on just elementary school projects we are not addressing the issue adequately. Considering how long it takes to plan, fund and construct, we need to be working on middle and high school buildings now.

Students currently in 5th grade will be starting at the new Paint Branch HS in 2012, the year it should open under the current schedule. This means we will start seeing the enrollment bubble children in our high schools just 5 years later. And, I will note that I am not adding in children that move to our county after being born, or including new home construction numbers, or the students that return to public high school after attending private middle schools. Clearly, high schools behind Paint Branch on the modernization schedule, Gaithersburg, Wheaton, Seneca Valley, will bear the brunt of the bubble, educating their students in potentially unmodernized, outdated, inadequate, and overcrowded buildings. Will they become the lost generation of students? New high schools are not an extravagance, but rather a necessity; and I submit, an important necessity.

Delaying the modernizations of the high schools is not a cost effective use of funds. It is, in fact, a false economy. Deteriorating infrastructure is very costly to maintain, and outdated facilities are much more expensive to heat, cool, and keep dry and safe. I have told you before of the fire alarm system at Paint Branch that was damaged in the fall of 2007, and was so out dated that replacement parts were not available. We had a live fire watch patrol for almost a month in order to remain open. At what cost? This is only one example of infrastructure failure. Since that time, we have had water pipes burst in our building. In addition, as is true in all old buildings, the HVAC system at Paint Branch is a continual concern. We have two chillers in the newer section of the building (H wing, built in 1987). In the spring of 2008, both went down. We struggled through the last month and a half of school with only one chiller functioning – a technician had to come to the school each morning last spring and into the summer to jump-start the chiller. At the present time only one chiller is functional and there is concern about whether it is even worth repairing. I would be remiss in not complimenting the staff at the Randolph Maintenance Depot, since they have been very responsive and creative in keeping our building functioning. But, they are not magicians, and are experiencing staffing cuts due to the tight budget. We fear for the future. I have attached to my testimony a list of other recent problems.

Our high schools, the largest portion of any modernization budget, are an easy target for cuts. And, indeed, we have repeatedly seen those cuts. I have also attached for your reading pleasure a partial history of the completion dates for Paint Branch HS's modernization. It is a fluid and compelling story. Indeed, it is also incomplete, with the final chapter pending! When exactly will our school be funded and built? We have been patient, we have waited, we have sacrificed, we have accepted delays. We are not unreasonable people; we believe in the need for shared sacrifice of all the citizens in Montgomery County to get us through the current financial crisis. But, we have already helped balance the budget, more than once. We were assessed for modernization in 1996. Last year's CIP left us with a new two-year delay. Assuming no further delays, Paint Branch will have waited 16 years after our assessment for our modernization to be completed and will be 43 years old when we vacate it.

We continually expect our schools to do more, and our students certainly expect and need more. Their achievement is tied to the resources we can provide for their use, to aid in their learning. Our number one priority should be to provide each student with a safe, secure and modern facility that is conducive to learning. When will our high schools become a priority? Our families say these projects are critical now! They touch every aspect of our communities: our students, our home values, our businesses, the workforce. We ask you, our elected leaders, to make them your top priority as well. We must fully fund the projects in the CIP! And, any additional funds the state or federal government might provide should be dedicated to relieving the logjam of delayed projects.

As an example of the costs and problems associated with not fully funding the CIP projects, Blake HS is requesting a feasibility study for an addition and an expansion to its gym. They are currently overcrowded, with 7 portables. The cautionary lesson to be learned from them is that when the school was built, they scaled back its size, including the core capacity, and no matter how many classroom additions are built the gym will always be too small. That is very expensive to fix. That is the danger of not fully funding the CIP projects. Please don't let this happen to Paint Branch or any other school.

Beyond the need for a modernized Paint Branch HS, safety and security is a common theme for all three high schools. More security cameras are needed. Our high schools are large, and outdoor

cameras are particularly important for the protection of our buildings. Blake has a 93 acre campus, making the issue of outdoor security that much more complex. In addition, the north parking lot at Paint Branch is woefully under-lighted. Being down below road level, at night the parking lot is out of view and dark. Outdoor lighting at Blake is also inadequate, especially at its front entrance. Blake High School is in a relatively secluded and wooded location. The lights are dim enough to make it difficult to see one's way through the parking lot and to deprive students of a secure area after events while awaiting transportation, and these are urgent safety concern for students, staff, and community members at both schools.

The building design of Paint Branch makes it difficult to isolate areas and secure the building. When it is being used for evening activities, or being used by the community, it is nearly impossible to restrict access to areas of the building that should not be in use. Because of the older design of the building, it is impossible to monitor the front entrance from the main office. It is necessary to have a staff member sit in the entryway to keep an eye on visitors to the school, taking away from the security coverage of the rest of the school. Paint Branch also has a concern about their exterior door locks, because over 40 years of use, many keys have been misplaced. It is felt that only a complete re-keying of the locks will make the building truly secure.

Springbrook HS needs their bathrooms renovated. This has been a request in past years, and we hope with the upcoming evaluation of additional schools for bathroom renovation, they will secure a spot on the list to alleviate this problem sooner rather than later. Currently bathroom maintenance is performed there 7 days a week. Many of the fixtures are so old that replacement parts are no longer available. Their first floor bathrooms (which need to accommodate not only students but most visitors) are so unappealing as to reflect poorly on the school.

Springbrook High School needs their TV Studio to be modernized. They are offering a state-of-the-art technology education to our students. However, the TV Studio is outdated. They need to replace the outdated equipment with new equipment such as a new switcher and an updated recording system. Given that Springbrook houses the Technology Signature Program, it seems only logical that its equipment remain state-of-the-art and functional.

Other issues such as an inadequate number of functional lockers in the halls and the locker rooms for Blake and Paint Branch, and the needed installation of safety nets at Blake may seem minor, but only point to the starkness of our bare bones budget.

While maintenance is an Operating Budget item, we feel it is important to mention that it really is a critical issue for our aging buildings, and it would make sense to link it to the CIP Budget. Just looking back over my testimony, you can find several places where maintenance plays an important role with the issues raised.

Let me close with the thought that "Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap" requires up to date facilities, especially in the most highly impacted schools.

We very much appreciate your giving us the opportunity to speak on behalf of our schools tonight. Thank you for your time and your consideration of these requests.

Respectfully,

The Northeast Consortium Cluster Coordinators

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Facility Ailments for Paint Branch High School
Compiled October 2008
Updated February 2009

- 1) We have two chillers in the newer section of the building (H wing, built in 1987). In the spring of 2008, both went down. We struggled through the last month and a half of school with only one chiller functioning – a technician had to come to the school each morning last spring and into the summer to jump start the chiller. At the present time only one chiller is functional and there is concern about whether it is worth it to repair it.
- 2) The weight room requires a sump pump and dehumidifier to maintain adequate air quality because the room is built over an underground spring; air quality concerns required additional waterproofing and the installation of special mats in 2006-2007. The only permanent fix is when we build our new school.
- 3) Fire alarm panel replaced – Nov. 2007 after a small electrical fire. The original system was so old, prefabricated replacement parts did not exist and had to be manufactured. During the time it took to manufacture the parts, we had a live “fire watch” patrol so that the school could safely remain open.
- 4) January 2009, the fire alarm could not be shut off following a fire drill. It was necessary to call the fire department to shut it off.
- 5) The building design makes it difficult to isolate areas and secure the building. The hallways are too small to accommodate the student body at the change of classes.
- 6) Two burst water pipes since October of 2008.
- 7) Stadium bleachers – a safety concern had been expressed regarding the visitor’s bleachers due to rusting of supports. Maintenance came out within one day and worked with our structural engineer to reinforce the supports so the bleachers could be used through the fall athletic season. A more permanent fix is required and planned.
- 8) Power surges are common, wreaking havoc with electronic equipment and systems – security cameras, fire doors, copiers, computers, phones, etc. In all fairness, it is currently not known if this is a building problem or a BG&E problem but new wiring certainly should help.
- 9) The building is terribly energy-inefficient – we try our best to conserve where we can, but only so much is possible. Lights, windows, A/C and heating are all issues.
- 10) Expanding staff and student body has required that spaces be converted for use as never intended. In some cases closets have been converted to offices and rooms have been divided creating issues with ventilation and temperature control as new walls and doors are added.
- 11) A water pipe broke in the parking lot (2007-2008 school year). By the next day it had been repaired, thanks to the Randolph Maintenance Depot, but old pipes are more prone to failure.

12) We have inadequate storage, especially for clubs, programs such as the Sports Academy, etc., we want to be “Community Friendly” but space is a real issue.

13) Old and outdated equipment in Foods Lab used by our restaurant management program.

14) Lockers –we are running out of them; locker room lockers are rusting.

15) Old and inadequate restroom facilities; stalls are rusting.

16) Carpeting in the media center was noted to be “unsightly” by a member of the BOE.

Paint Branch HS modernization project partial timeline:
Compiled Feb. 2009

In March of 1999, Paint Branch was put on the modernization schedule with a date of 2009.
(Completion Sept 2009 in amended FY 01-06 CIP)

November 2001, Superintendent recommends in the FY 2003 Capital Budget and FY 2003 to FY 2008 Capital Improvement Program, a delay in the modernization of Paint Branch HS, with a completion date of 2012.

Feb. 6, 2002, testimony was given when the modernization was proposed to be delayed to a 2012 completion – a 3 year delay. (I believe that all HSs were delayed at this time).

October 2003, Superintendent recommends in FY 2005 Capital Budget and FY 2005 to FY 2010 Capital Improvements Program that school completion date be moved up to 2009/2010, with planning funds in 2006. Dec. 22, 2003, testimony was given to move modernization up to a 2009/2010 completion.

October 2004, Superintendent recommends in FY 2006 Capital Budget and Amended FY 2005-2010 Capital Improvements Program scheduled completion of 2010/2011.

October 2005, Superintendent recommends in FY 2007 Capital Budget and FY 2007-2012 Capital Improvements Program scheduled completion of 2010/2011. Nov. 6, 2005, testified to stay on schedule. January 27, 2006, possible delay of 2 years considered.

October 2007, Superintendent recommends in FY 2009 Capital Budget and FY 2009-2014 Capital Improvements Program, proposed delay of one year with proposed completion of 2011/2012. November 2007, County Council delayed the completion by an additional year in Spring of 2008, with completion date now 2012/2013.

October 2008, Superintendent recommends in FY 2010 Capital Budget and Amendments to the FY 2009-2014 Capital Improvements Program a 2012/2013 completion.