

Northwest Cluster

Northwest High School

Clopper Mill Elementary School

Darnestown Elementary School

Diamond Elementary School

Germantown Elementary School

Kingsview Middle School

Great Seneca Creek Elementary School

Lakelands Park Middle School (shared)

Ronald McNair Elementary School

Roberto Clemente Middle School (shared)

Spark M. Matsunaga Elementary School

2009 Operating Budget Testimony

to the Board of Education

January 9, 2008

Hello, my name is Susan Burkinshaw and I am one of the Northwest Cluster Co- Coordinators, along with my partner Bob Murphy.

Understanding that as a community we are facing a very tight fiscal year, our number one request is that you prioritize your decisions based on our children's safety in their learning environments. As fellow taxpayers, we would also request that you consider environmentally responsible solutions that will yield future cost-savings to our county and will also minimize our shared environmental footprint.

As such, we would like to see an ongoing evaluation of the MCPS transportation system to ensure that children within walking distance can safely walk to their schools—currently there are schools in our Cluster where our kids must be bussed literally across the street, because there is no safe crossing. As a similar example, in my neighborhood, where my house is only 1/3 mile as the crow flies to Northwest High School, there are no sidewalks out of my neighborhood to facilitate walking, so children in my neighborhood must be bussed the less than one-mile distance along local streets to get to the high school safely. It seems like with an investment in making our communities safer to walk we could benefit from long-term transportation cost-savings.

Although we understand that in the long run this may include working with the County to be sure sidewalks and safe crossings are installed around the County, this type of solution will have a longer-term savings of reducing transportation routes and will also facilitate the “walkability” of our communities. Furthermore,

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we recognize that this type of solution may also mean that boundaries across the county will need to be re-evaluated to this greater end.

On the other hand, Lakelands Middle School is a shining example of a walkable community. It already has the unique upcounty situation of a high percentage of walkers (approximately 45%); however, the safety of these children is of major concern daily because of the lack of traffic controls around the school.

It has been told to our Cluster families that middle schools are not assigned crossing guards. However, this fallacy has been disproved by the fact that there are two crossing guards assigned to Kingsview Middle School to facilitate safe crossing there. It has also been reported to us that there had been a crossing guard assigned to the intersection of Rt. 124 and Longdraft Rd/Kentlands Blvd to facilitate safe crossing across that busy road for Ridgeview Middle School students before Lakelands Middle School opened.

There is special concern about the following intersections around Lakelands Middle School. First of all, at Bright Meadow Road and Main Street in the Lakelands community, adjacent to the school, there is a lot of traffic—including cars and busses picking up and dropping off students—compounded by parked cars on both sides of Main Street.

Currently the school staff is facilitating safe crossing, seemingly a major liability for our county's teachers, and most likely not what they signed up for when they applied for jobs at Lakelands Middle School. We appreciate their concern for our kids as they step up to the plate to protect our children at the very apparent risk of their own safety. This has a further negative impact on the areas where teachers assigned to monitor these crossings were taken off a duty assignment—supervising students in the building or helping students at the buses.

There have been formal requests to the County and to the City of Gaithersburg to install a three-way stop sign at this particular intersection, but to no avail.

Another dangerous crossing is for those children assigned to cross Route 28, a four-lane highway, at Owens Glen Way to get to Main Street from the Potomac Valley community. Although there is a traffic signal at this intersection and lines have been painted on the road, this is a very busy road with vehicles averaging much higher than the 40 mph posted limit, as indicated by the need for Montgomery County and Gaithersburg City Police to enforce the speed limit regularly in this area. Since many parents from the Potomac Valley neighborhood have chosen to drive their kids to school regularly instead of risking their safety crossing this unsupervised intersection, the problem at the previously mentioned intersection is compounded with this increased traffic.

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There is a clear and present danger to the children who walk to Lakelands Middle School and we cannot in good conscience let this go unnoticed and undocumented—we certainly don't want anyone to have to say, "We told you so." Although crossing guards seem to be necessary, at a minimum these concerns need to be evaluated more closely by the MCPS school safety experts. It is our understanding that crossing guards fall under the Community Service Division within the Police Department, and that the Police Department coordinates with MCPS, but their budget allocation actually falls within the Police Department. Since the administration and PTA volunteers at Lakelands Middle School keep getting the runaround, we are appealing to you, the Board, hoping that your intervention will help resolve these concerns.

The Northwest Cluster is fortunate to include Great Seneca Creek Elementary, the first and only LEED Gold school in Maryland. Here we are experiencing not only the environmental benefits of a facility built with the principles of a minimizing the building's environmental impact, but also the longer term operating cost savings of being in a facility that maximizes its resource utilization. As such, our Cluster encourages you to continue to be fiscally responsible as you prioritize and implement environmentally renewable solutions across the county.

Along the lines of our plea for environmental responsibility, you are aware that Matsunaga Elementary School testified at the CIP hearing that they are interested in becoming a prototype for an "environmentally friendly learning cottage" school. They asked that we reiterate in our testimony this evening their interest to have their classroom portables replaced with those that are more environmentally friendly. We would expect that you would consider this option across the county.

We encourage you to continue to evaluate this budget closely to ensure that each child in this county is safe in and around their schools, and that as a county school system we continue to promote and execute solutions with long-term cost-efficiencies and minimal environmental impact.

*Respectfully submitted by:
Susan Burkinshaw and Bob Murphy, 2007-8 Northwest Cluster Co-Coordinator*