

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

November 13, 2008

Blake High School
Paint Branch High School
Springbrook High School

Good evening Superintendent Weast, Mrs. Navarro, and members of the Board. 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.

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. Blake HS thanks you for the conversion of existing space to science labs and the replacement of the cracked floor tiles in the foyer and entrance hall. Paint Branch is appreciative of the cable being run to the new portable classroom and the efforts of the Division of Construction staff as they work to secure permits to demolish the vacant house adjacent to our school. Springbrook is appreciative of the attention to their request for more security cameras. Despite these improvements however, our high schools continue to suffer key needs.

I know you can predict some of what I plan to say tonight, but in order to maintain my “annoying mother” status, I have a minimum daily harping quota, and you are the lucky recipients tonight, and my husband thanks you, since I have not reached my quota for today.

We all know the realities of the budget and economy. We know that in these tight budgetary times, we can't fund everything. 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 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. And, that is assuming that the current schedule holds!

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. We must fully fund the projects in the CIP.

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.

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. We continue to request that MCPS help fund the addition of cameras inside and outside the high schools.

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.

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.

For student safety, Blake requests netting at each end of their stadium. At one end, the balls going out of bounds end up in an area infested with snakes. At the other end, the balls fly into the concessions area, presenting a hazard to spectators.

An adequate number of lockers are not available at Blake and Paint Branch. Broken locks limit the availability of existing lockers at Paint Branch, and the stacking lockers in the gym are rusting out top and bottom.

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.

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.

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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