



BEALL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PARENT TEACHER ASSOCIATION

November 11, 2011

Via email: boe@mcpsmd.gov

Mr. Christopher S. Barclay, President
and Members of the Montgomery County Board of Education
Carver Education Services Center
850 Hungerford Drive, Room 123
Rockville Maryland 20850

Dear Mr. Barclay and Members of the Board of Education:

I stand before you to share with you the thoughts of the Beall community at large, as President of Beall PTA and as a public health professional. Dr. Starr's Recommendation for our RMHS Cluster for the 2013-2018 CIP is a good effort in trying to alleviate overcrowding in our elementary schools and our single middle school. At Beall ES, just like the other overcrowded elementary schools in our Cluster, we are concerned with the safety and health issues that arise from the nearly 800 little bodies going through our tight hallways and an inadequate school building. At this point, I believe that it's not just an inconvenience but it has become a major public health issue. Despite the best efforts by our former principal Mr. Boddy in the past years and Principal Alter this year, it's just very difficult to manage the sheer number of students in a school not built for 800 students. The long lines that take time away from eating lunch and playing at recess have health consequences. Overcrowding has brought up serious health and safety concerns with our community.

Many of our children, including the germ carrying kindergarteners, go from recess to lunch without washing their hands because there are not enough sinks in the bathrooms. When they are given hand sanitizers, they immediately wipe it off on their clothes. Before we even made it to the month of November, we already had many students out sick from strep infections, stomach flus and head lice. This autumn, we already had one girl with a bladder infection because, as a third grader, she is in one of the many portable classrooms outside and in the back of the school building. The children in these portable

classrooms tend to just “hold it in” until the entire class comes in together because the children are afraid to miss any instructional time from the long walk to and from the bathrooms located inside the main building.

The seven portable classrooms have taken up most of our school’s black top play area. The children who are stuck with the lower playground next to these portables barely have any room to roam free. Whatever little grassy area left next to the portables in the lower playground, is usually muddy from the poor drainage caused by the portables. It ices over in the winter so the students lose even more play space. In fact, there is not much time to play (or eat for that matter) because they spend their 30 minutes of recess, lining up to go in, to go out and to wait for a toilet or a sink. In this environment, we are creating a generation of sedentary Beall students who are either sitting in the classroom or are standing around waiting in line to go in or out of them. The students have no other room but the classrooms for indoor recess because we have to double up on PE classes in the gym while the other students are taking lunch and recess. All our wonderful elementary schools administrators have taken away their valuable time to spend on figuring out crowd management techniques, how to fit more students into the building, how to convert office and bathrooms into more usable space and how to make sure that the students stay safe in transition from classrooms, at arrival and at dismissal.

Recess is a battleground even with a small group of students but imagine one with over a hundred and thirty children. Last year at recess, one student fell off the play structure, hit his head on the way down but no one reported the incident to an adult. Unfortunately, a little while later, the child became unconscious in the classroom due to a head concussion. It’s just nearly impossible to keep track of the masses of little bodies even with a brigade of staff and parent volunteers.

Recess is not the only unsafe place. There are so many children on our school buses that some of them have no seats to sit safely to and from school? Did you know that last year at dismissal a child did not get to the school bus on time and began to wander 3 blocks away from the school before another Beall parent stopped him? It occurred because over 1,000 people were crammed at and around the doors at dismissal time. He went unnoticed because of the nearly 800 students at Beall ES, the hundreds of people trying to pick up these students and a reduction in staff and teachers to help with the crowd.

We simply have too many children for the number of staff to check up on all the students. Beall has been fortunate to have the best principals but it's just unfair to keep asking them to work within an inadequate facility with the huge number of student because they just cannot win.

Let me stress that sitting at a table at a school's cafeteria should not be an option or a luxury for our children, going to use the toilet or washing hands should not be a luxury for our staff and our children as if we are in a drought in East Africa. Health and safety are certainly not optional in such a rich county. We live in a place with safe clean water and our students and staff should have easy access to them.

In a few year, when all these students from Beall, College Gardens, Ritchie Park and Twinbrook elementary schools have to move up to attend to middle school, Julius West will be the largest middle school in Montgomery County. We hope that the BOE will not consider a larger cafeteria as optional. It is unfair to these students to suffer from inadequate facilities in elementary schools and then in middle school as well. The students of JWMS deserve a complete and adequate facility built to serve all of the proposed 1,440 students.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that although we have the best teachers, staff and administrators but the high volume of students in an inadequate school building cannot be solved by commitment and dedication. Therefore, I encourage the BOE to support the Superintendent's Recommendations for the RMHS Cluster for ES#5 and an additional building and cafeteria to JWMS.

With Respect,

Tida Violante

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