



**Before the Montgomery County Board of Education  
MCCPTA Testimony  
Superintendent's Recommended  
FY 2013 Capital Budget and  
FY 2013-2018 Capital Improvements Program**

**November 10, 2011**

Good evening, President Barclay and Members of the Board of Education. I am Kristin Tribble, President of the Montgomery County Council of PTAs. I speak tonight on behalf of the over 50,000 members in our organization to advocate for the welfare of the 147,000 MCPS students in the county. MCCPTA speaks with one voice for all children.

Every year, MCCPTA adopts a set of priorities for the capital budget. Each year, we describe how these priorities will provide a safe, secure and modern facility for all of our students. These priorities aim to address the variability not just amongst teaching and learning but amongst school buildings. These priorities seek to create school environments that are most conducive to productive learning.

In most years, this county's steadfast support of public education means that the debate lies in how far you can go to advance our priorities, not whether our priorities are being advanced at all. But this year is different. This year, the Superintendent's Recommendation does not advance all of our priorities. In addition, there is significant uncertainty about how much the County will make available to fund education priorities. As a result, this year, we cannot support the Superintendent's Recommendation.

As you will hear in the testimony over these two nights, we support many of the individual projects listed in the Recommendation, and we are pleased to see more being proposed in the area of systemic maintenance. But you also will hear in the testimony that many of our priorities are not being addressed, or are being delayed. In particular, MCCPTA opposes the delay in the middle and high school modernization schedule. This delay wastes the best construction market in a decade, and harms students at 23 middle and high schools either on or waiting to be added to the modernization list.

We believe that these projects can be kept on track and stay within our County's means. Getting to that end is a big task – a much bigger task than the short CIP review period allows. To achieve our goal, we will need the cooperation of the Board, MCPS and MCCPTA to identify and analyze the options available within the budget. We also will need the help of the state, the County Executive, and the County Council to meet our

capital needs. So, this year, we have a different request of the Board of Education. Even though you must submit an initial request to the County Executive this month, we ask that your consideration of the CIP not end on November 17. We ask that you continue to work with us to keep the modernizations on track, to provide capacity where it is needed, and to fund our systemic needs. This will take a cooperative and practical attitude by everyone to accomplish. But we believe that goal is achievable.

### **School Modernizations**

Despite efforts to “catch up” with deteriorating school buildings, MCPS continues to modernize at a pace that is too slow. The proposal to delay the middle and high school modernizations only exacerbates that already slow pace.<sup>1</sup> Examining the long list of schools on the modernization list or waiting to be added to the modernization list, it is clear that MCPS will need to devote substantial resources just to bring these buildings to a level enjoyed by other students in the county.

Our primary complaint with the proposed delay in the modernizations is that it ignores the opportunity presented by the best construction market in at least a decade. MCPS reports that current bids continue to be 20-30% lower than they were a few years ago. Surely this is the result of a down economy where construction firms are aggressively competing to maintain business. It’s a buyer’s market, especially for large projects like our modernizations. When the prospect is saving 30% on a \$40 million middle school or a \$90 million high school, the prudent thing to do is to attempt to bid the project sooner rather than later. In fact, if the Board were to compare the construction cost estimates of individual projects in the Current Replacements/Modernizations line item in the CIP budget, you will see virtually every estimate has been reduced by several million dollars or more. These modernizations are the best value available at this time.

As we have in the past, we urge the Board to be more transparent in the Current Replacement/Modernization line item in the CIP. This line item represents modernizations for which construction funds are allocated in the next two fiscal years. This line item currently aggregates all of those projects, making it difficult to track the estimates of individual projects over time. We urge the Board to publish the details of each individual project estimate within this line item annually.

### **County-wide Projects**

MCCPTA has been please to see the CIP gradually shift more money toward core systemic projects such as HVAC, PLAR and Roof Replacements. County-wide programs such as these have been very successful in the past and can, over the long term, lessen the need for extensive renovations or modernizations as our newer facilities age. We therefore have consistently supported the expansion of existing county-wide

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<sup>1</sup> Even the discussion of a “pace” of modernizations is a bit misleading. The Board has not set an objective for when schools should be modernized. Instead, reports of the “pace” of modernizations, merely represents the number of schools modernized recently divided by the total number of schools at that educational level. With the Superintendent’s proposed delay, the pace of modernizations will lengthen.

programs and the development of new systemic programs similar to the roof replacement and HVAC programs in the CIP. We need MORE well-defined county-wide budget programs that maintain our schools and lessen the need for costly repairs and remediation, that lower energy usage and that improve security in existing school buildings.

With respect to the HVAC project, for example, we would like to see MCPS set a target for routine replacement/rehabilitation of HVAC systems. We believe the annual amount allocated to HVAC replacements should reflect a reasonable expectation of the useful life of a system and should enable MCPS to replace or rehabilitate the HVAC systems at all 200 schools at the end of each system's useful life. In other words, we should not plan the HVAC item (as we do today) based on the amount of money we think is available. We should plan it based on the amount we project is needed.

In addition, we would like the CIP to include a list of the projects planned for the next two years under the HVAC program. Although we recognize that sometimes urgent needs may develop that were not anticipated, publishing a tentative list of HVAC projects will better enable us to evaluate whether the program is adequate to meet the needs of the county's schools.

With respect to the "Building Modifications and Program Improvements" line item ("BMPI"), we would like more definition of the projects eligible for funding under this program. In the past, it has been hard to determine precisely what types of projects are suitable for this program, and the variability in projects has been great. In addition, schools on the modernization list often are given conflicting information concerning whether BMPI projects will be considered for their schools. These eligibility questions should be clarified.

More generally, we would like better information on the ranking criteria used by MCPS for prioritization of projects within the county-wide programs. With the full implementation of the maintenance tracking system, we should be able to identify more precisely how each of these line items is being spent each year. Moreover, we would like the planned projects for each county-wide program to be listed each year, even as we understand that the rankings may be adjusted over the year due to urgent health and safety issues, unanticipated breakdowns and the like. As is, it is virtually impossible for parents to determine if the urgent needs of our schools are being addressed.

Finally, costs that are embedded in countywide projects should be examined closely for overlap and cost savings. Over the next few months, we recommend that the Board review all of the county-wide line items to determine if any are in fact duplicative and to determine where cost efficiencies can be achieved.

### **Other Concerns**

For many years, we have expressed concern with the relationship between capital replacements, which are funded through the CIP, and maintenance, which is an Operating Budget item. For years, MCPS has struggled to keep up with repairs and has had precious little room for preventive maintenance. If MCPS wants its buildings to last longer, plans must be made to maintain them better. However, because maintenance is not considered until the Operating Budget, it often is difficult to evaluate the adequacy of either the capital budget or the level of maintenance needed to support the CIP. For example, when new schools or additional capacity are added, do we need to increase the maintenance capacity as well? If so, by how much, and where? We urge the Board to integrate into the CIP planning cycle an assessment of the impact that the capital program will have on MCPS's maintenance needs.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we recognize that the short term economic difficulties place great pressures on this budget and on your task as a Board. Nevertheless, we believe that our CIP priorities can be better achieved through alternatives to the Superintendent's Recommendation. We pledge to continue to work with the Board, MCPS and all stakeholders to identify the best alternatives over the next few months. We ask that you continue to work with us to keep the modernizations on track, to provide capacity where it is needed, and to fund our systemic needs. This will take a cooperative and practical attitude by all. All of the solutions will require time and an open mind. Therefore, we ask you tonight to give both of those to us.

Thank you and good evening.