

**Testimony Before the Montgomery County Board of Education
On the Superintendent's Recommended FY 2013–2018 CIP**

**Whitman Cluster
November 10, 2011**

Good evening, Dr. Starr and members of the Montgomery County Board of Education. I am Keith Parsky, and together with Jean Schlesinger and Elise Browne Hughes, we represent the Whitman Cluster. We always “Listen and Learn” from you and value this opportunity to appear before you to testify in support of the Superintendent’s FY 2013-2018 Capital Budget and the Capital Improvements Program (CIP). We applaud the Superintendent’s overarching plan to move forward with additions and modernizations to provide the classrooms needed for current and projected enrollment. However, we urge that you do everything in your power to keep planned additions and modernizations throughout the county on track—especially now, when the county can take advantage of the lowest construction rates in a decade. We pledge to continue to advocate at the local and state level for the funding needed to help make all of these projects a reality.

Our Cluster is grateful for the forthcoming construction of the classroom and core space addition at Bradley Hills Elementary School, scheduled for completion in August 2013. We are hopeful that funding for this project will be adequate to enable expansion of the media center—one of the smallest in the County—to serve the near doubling of the school’s original capacity. This is a smart solution that will optimize the overall space and serve students for generations to come.

Our Cluster strongly supports the Superintendent's recommendation for an addition at Wood Acres Elementary School, with a target completion date of August 2016. With enrollment at nearly 200 students above program capacity, Wood Acres is beyond cramped. An ever-increasing number of students are being educated in portables. The lunch period has been extended to begin at 10:45 a.m. and end at 1:45 p.m., in order to safely fit all the students into the cafeteria. Specialists in music, P.E., art, and ESOL must share small rooms, use the cafeteria, and work on carts. We ask the Board to support the Superintendent's recommendation to build the needed classrooms at Wood Acres.

We would like to make one request of you this evening beyond what is provided in the current CIP: We ask that an ample auxiliary gymnasium be built at Pyle Middle School to serve the population for which the current classroom space was built—and for which there is undisputed need. Pyle is successfully educating 1,340 students. The CIP projects an increase of 150 students over the next six years. With strong school leadership in place, our community is confident that we can continue that success at projected enrollment levels with appropriate supports. Pyle does, however, need an auxiliary gymnasium now to enable the school to safely and effectively deliver the Physical Education curriculum to the current student population. This is a safety and curriculum issue that should not be deferred for a later CIP.

We would also like to note our dismay that the CIP includes a statement that

Westland Middle School might have space to allow the “sharing” of that middle school with the Whitman Cluster upon the opening of a new B-CC middle school (currently projected for completion in August 2017). As stated previously, our community is confident that Pyle can successfully educate all students at projected enrollment levels with appropriate supports—without the need for boundary shifts, split articulation, or division of the strong community we all value. We welcome the opportunity to work with you and explore all other viable options within our Cluster.

To do otherwise would be taking a step backwards. MCPS recently completed a boundary study, shifting students from Bethesda Elementary to Bradley Hills Elementary School in order to promote straight articulation within our cluster. Let’s do what’s best for our students and keep straight articulation a priority.

Moreover, moving a portion of our population to Westland would unnecessarily open another can of worms. Because Westland is an International Baccalaureate (IB) middle school, students who start this fine program would rightfully expect to continue down the IB pathway, which is not offered at Whitman. This would certainly lead to a surge in Change of School Assignment (COSA) requests from those who wished to continue in the IB program, but for whom there is no space at B-CC High School, which is already overcrowded. Furthermore, relying on the possibility of space at Westland seems a longshot

given the continuing surge in enrollment growth in the B-CC cluster and plans for further residential development in that area.

In closing, we ask that you build the auxiliary gym needed at Pyle to enable our middle school to safely deliver the Physical Education curriculum now, and that we work together to develop sensible options to support the comparatively modest projected growth at Pyle within our current boundaries. Strong communities translate into strong schools; fracturing them should be a last resort. Thank you.