



**Testimony on the
FY 08 Capital Budget and
Amendments to the FY 2007-2012 Capital Improvements Program
November 15, 2006**

Good evening, President Haughey and Members of the Board of Education—current and soon to be. I am Jane de Winter, President of the Montgomery County Council of PTAs. I speak for over 50,000 parents and on behalf of more than 138,000 MCPS students advocating for every child to attend school in a safe, secure and modern facility. This evening I will discuss how we can make “safe, secure, and modern” the standard for all of our 199 facilities, while over the next two nights our cluster coordinators will talk about their individual school needs. We value this opportunity to focus on our school buildings—both to highlight immediate concerns regarding deteriorating and overcrowded facilities and to seriously improve long-range facility planning.

MCCPTA supports the Superintendent’s Recommended FY 2008 Capital Budget and Amendments to the FY 2007-2012 Capital Improvements Program. This ambitious CIP continues to build additions, modernize schools, and provide much-needed repairs and replacements to many of our outdated and overworked physical plants. We are gratified that our previous testimony for larger construction budgets has produced positive results. We will continue to lobby the Council and the State for necessary funds. Monday night we met with many of our state legislators to share ideas on increasing school construction dollars and funding our operating budget priorities. We also spoke of establishing standards for portable classrooms, improving pedestrian safety, and working with our new governor.

MCCPTA agrees with the Superintendent that portables must not be a long-term solution and that we should reduce the number of children attending classes in these relocatables. We have said this for years. We want to expand upon Dr. Weast’s theme of “a great classroom for every teacher” by setting a standard for all instructional space. Every child and teacher should be in a classroom that is secure; with adequate program space; where appropriate technology is available; and where air quality is good and the water safe to drink. We want safe access to our school buildings and parking lots. And as a community, we must do more to ensure pedestrian safety.

We want school facilities to reflect the diverse program needs for today’s instruction – including rooms for ESOL classes and special education, science, computer, and

language labs, as well as flexible spaces, such as for lecture rooms. We want rooms for reading initiatives, music, and art. We want all of our schools to have adequate and modern restrooms.

In this amendment year, we think it is critical to focus on long-range planning. While it has been exciting to open five new schools this year for a total of eight new schools in the past three years, we have only completed four modernizations in the same three year period with none completed last year. Looking beyond the short term plan for more additions the modernization schedule is both too long and too slow. We are concerned that there is a one-to-six-year backlog of maintenance projects. And we are concerned that the current 48-year elementary modernization cycle, the 76-year middle school modernization cycle, and the 50-year high school modernization cycle makes it impossible to properly plan for school construction and life-cycle replacements.

The backlog of maintenance projects, totaling \$40-50 million for repairs and replacements (per MCPS Maintenance Department Director, Roy Higgins), means barely replacing major systems when needed, and leaves a minimum of funds for preventive maintenance in the budget. Schools awaiting modernization often endure substandard mechanical systems for many years, as it doesn't make sense to replace a HVAC system in a building that will be torn down in a few years. Unfortunately, as modernizations have been postponed, schools end up with band-aid repairs far too long and far too often. We would like an update on lead remediation. We will continue to ask for additional focus and funds for maintenance projects, maintenance staff to repair and replace a multitude of systems and for preventative maintenance projects in both the capital and operating budgets.

In order to intelligently plan for the future, we must assess the schools that do not have FACT scores in order to put these schools in a preliminary ranking list. We need to evaluate the FACT score formula and process itself. We believe it is critical to know where a school might be ranked in order to plan for future repairs and capacity projects. We have attached a list of schools which is ordered by date built or modernized but we need a clear plan which is based on a new set of criteria for determining timing for modernization. This list is not to be taken as our ranking for the remaining schools, but merely a list of schools by age, alphabetical order, and current enrollment. (*See Attachment A*)

We also believe MCPS should develop and publish a clear set of criteria for school additions. The criteria might include: capacity; enrollment; construction projects on site; future modernization dates; special programs; number of portables; the length of time portables have been on site—showing sustained need; and the age and condition of portables. The process which prioritizes additions must be transparent so that there isn't the perception that some schools get additions or other capital projects based on factors other than facility needs. Consider the attached list of additions followed by the list of schools with four or more portables that do not have addition projects planned (*Attachment B*)—it is not clear why a school is on one list rather than the other.

We understand the other forces driving the capital budget including the short-term need for seats, the desire to reduce the number of portables, MCPS' capacity to build or repair projects within a given time frame, and the realities of fiscal constraints; but we must begin to look at the whole picture and plan for the long-term. We begin by asking these questions:

- Is there a plan for how to accelerate the modernization schedule?
- Where is the plan for additional holding schools?
- What happens when we need a high school holding school?
- Where is the serious discussion on doing full modernizations vs smaller renovations based on the Council report?
- When might those renovations or core improvements with an addition be appropriate?
- How can the FACT score process be improved?
- How will changing demographics affect facility and program needs?
- How can we address the huge backlog of maintenance projects?
- What will the impact of new educational specifications for high schools mean?
- Where will the new mid-county high school be located?
- Will we need additional school sites?
- Where might they be located?
- How can we work with the county to ensure adequate school seats arrive hand in hand with new developments?
- How will special education programs be incorporated in this long-range planning to prevent frequent program changes and overcrowding due to the growth in these programs?

We think these critical questions must be asked, studied, and answered. We have approached the County Council and proposed the creation of a work group on substantive long-range facility planning with representatives from MCPS staff, MCCPTA, the County Council, and the business community. Council Member Mike Knapp has agreed to head up such a work group to begin in December or January. We urge MCPS to participate in this work group with an open mind and a sincere commitment.

Finally, when Policy FAA was last revised in 2005, it was agreed there would be an evaluation of it in 2007. We would like to begin those discussions now, repeating what we said at that time; and what we said in our comments on the FAA-RA workgroup. There needs to be language that clearly defines the role of parents, PTA's and the community in the FAA policy; and we feel that the preferred ranges of enrollment, capacity calculations, and site size should be spelled out in the policy, not in the regulations. Parents and community members should have the opportunity for input, and then decisions should be based on sound educational principles, not just facility planning expediencies. We note that the calculation for capacity for middle schools has changed in this CIP to a more realistic 85%, but we feel that these kinds of calculations should be determined by the Board; with appropriate notifications and opportunities for public comment. The FAA-RA workgroup was a model for how regulations should be developed, with parent and community input, an opportunity for public comment and

discussion by the Board. *(See Attachment C for our statement on Policy FAA and FAA-RA.)*

In closing, we appreciate the opportunity to raise these issues, and welcome future dialogue. We need to continue to build permanent space for our large school system, to ensure that every facility meets the standard with modernizations and timely repairs; we need to develop a feasible plan for future facility needs, and we must make a plan to reduce the backlog of maintenance projects. We urge you to use this amendment year for long-range planning and include development of criteria for additions, ranking schools for modernization, and participate in the work group on long-range planning to answer many of the questions we have asked. We must plan so that every child will attend school in a safe, secure, modern facility. Let's leave a legacy of buildings and a long-range plan that addresses the needs for every child now and in the future.