



The Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations

**Before the Montgomery County Council
MCCPTA Testimony
FY 2011 Capital Budget and
the FY 2011-2016 Capital Improvements Program**

February 16, 2010

Good evening, President Floreen and Members of the County Council. I am Kay Romero, 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 more than 140,000 MCPS students in the county. MCCPTA speaks with one voice for all children.

Tonight and tomorrow night, you will hear from cluster representatives about the individual needs of the cluster schools and special centers. Collectively, we support the County Executive's budget because it furthers three key objectives of MCCPTA. At the same time, we continue to work with the Board of Education to identify ways that the Board can save money in this tight economy. We also are pleased that the Board has scheduled a CIP worksession for this summer to address the modernization and upkeep of our school facilities. This worksession is an important first step toward the CIP Task Force that MCCPTA has advocated for several years. We applaud the Board for taking this action and we will work with them to identify ways that the budgets for future years can do more with fewer resources.

First, we applaud that the budget includes a significant increase in county-wide projects to renew and revitalize our school facilities. Since 1990, MCPS has opened or modernized 92 schools – 45 percent of the 200 schools in the county. Our challenge now is to keep these schools looking and operating as if they were “new” schools. To do that, the county needs to increase its investment in the periodic renewal of schools, such as is provided by the HVAC replacement line item in the budget. After years of urging increases, MCCPTA is pleased that the budget before you triples the HVAC line item to \$15 million per year. This is money well spent, for properly functioning heating and air conditioning are vital to adequate learning environments. In addition, upgrading HVAC systems promotes indoor air quality and saves in utility usage. We support this shift to more HVAC spending.

Second, this budget takes significant steps to address overcrowding in our schools. The budget includes \$91 million over six years to relieve severe overcrowding in the Bethesda, Clarksburg, Northwest and Seneca Valley clusters, but other schools remain severely overcrowded with no visible relief in sight. And, we must recognize that for the past two years, kindergarten classes have been the largest ever, and are predicted to continue to increase for a few years at least. We are urging the Board of Education to assess whether we have adequate capacity to accommodate these students, not only at the elementary level but also at the middle and high school level. No student should spend all of his or her educational years in portables or a construction zone.

Third, the budget moves forward with planned additions and modernizations on their current schedules. This decision takes maximum advantage of the opportunity presented by a down construction market. Projects such as Paint Branch High School came in at nearly \$30 million less than originally projected, a savings that allowed us to complete more projects with the same money that was previously budgeted. We are hopeful that future CIPs can achieve similar savings with the next group of schools in the queue.

At the same time, we are working with the Board of Education to identify additional opportunities for savings in the current budget. This is not the appropriate place to discuss our ideas, but we want to assure you that we view the CIP process as a year long process, and we will continue to work with the Board to ensure that MCPS is as efficient and smart as possible with the county's tax dollars.

Finally, we are pleased that the Board of Education has scheduled a CIP worksession for this summer. For several years, we have asked the Board and the County Council to work with us to address long range capital needs for our schools. We look at this worksession as an important first step in that dialogue. In particular, it is our goal to see that we take this year to examine the process for modernizing schools and the criteria to be used to assess schools for modernization, so that we can move forward in the next full CIP with the remaining assessments.

The first objective of the task force should be to identify ways to accelerate the modernization process itself, such as by standardizing school designs in order to shorten the planning period. We also should look for ways to implement systemic upgrades in order to lengthen the useful life of school facilities.

We remain anxious to assess the remaining schools that have not yet been assessed for modernization. Each year that there are schools that should be, but are not, assessed for modernization, means that the county falls farther behind and creates an even larger need for school construction. But we would first like to see a review of the criteria that comprise the current FACT score rubric. We cannot use the FACT criteria without a better understanding of the factors that comprise that rubric and an assessment of whether they remain relevant today. We believe the worksession can make important progress in this area.

In conclusion, we thank the council for its attention to the needs of our schools. We recognize that the short term economic difficulties place great pressures on this budget and on your task as a Council. The budget before you makes prudent investments in our schools at a time when construction costs are favorable to provide students with the appropriate learning facilities for success. We urge you to approve this budget.

Thank you and good evening.

Kay Romero, President
Montgomery County Council of PTAs