



**MCCPTA Testimony
Regarding the Capital Improvements Program
Before the Montgomery County Board of Education
December 8, 2009**

Good morning, President O’Neill and Members of the Board of Education. I am Kay Romero, President of the Montgomery County Council of PTAs.

Last month, you heard two days of testimony from MCCPTA and our cluster representatives concerning the FY 2011-16 Capital Improvements Program (“CIP”).¹ The hearings discussed a series of concerns our PTAs have with the quality and safety of our school facilities, and generated many inquiries from Board members. The Board has now approved a recommended CIP, but I am here today to urge you to continue your follow up on the issues raised by those hearings. In particular, MCCPTA believes that four items deserve meaningful attention before the County Council adopts a budget in May.

1. The Board should prepare the next set of construction projects for bid within the next 12 months.

In MCCPTA’s testimony, we urged you to take maximum advantage of the opportunity presented by a down construction market to prepare additional projects for bid in the near future. We presented a study showing that you can proceed faster than MCPS claims, and several of the schools that we identified as good candidates for acceleration of the bid preparation are before you for design-related approvals today. For these projects, we urge you to:

- Set an expectation that the projects will be ready to bid no more than 12 months from today;
- Require MCPS to report at least monthly on the progress of the design phase of these projects; and
- Require MCPS to identify any specific obstacles to completion of the design within this time frame so that the Board may address the obstacles.

Importantly, accelerating the design phase does not bind you to accelerating the construction of the projects. By preparing these projects so they are ready to be bid within the next 12 months, you put the Board in control of when to actually seek bids based on funding availability and market conditions.

2. The Board should critically examine the condition of our school’s restrooms

¹ For your convenience, a copy of MCCPTA’s testimony is attached.

We strongly support the goal of ensuring that all restrooms have fixtures that work, floors and partitions in good order and generally are clean and well maintained. Our experience with the first round of the restroom renovation project has been mixed at best. Before simply continuing with more of the same for the next group of schools, the Board should evaluate whether the objectives could be achieved through different means. Your review of the Operating Budget provides an opportunity to determine whether maintenance and security are adequately being provided for our restrooms.

Further, even among those clusters that have urged you to continue the project, there are concerns that MCPS complete the renovations so that they are meaningful. If the project is to continue as a capital item, the Board should set clear standards for renovations and should closely examine the order of schools proposed in the CIP. In our testimony, we identified several instances where the ordering of schools is questionable. These questions should be addressed in the coming months.

3. The Board should proceed with the CIP Task Force promptly

We also are concerned that MCPS is rushing its outcome on the assessment of new schools not on the modernization list. We support the creation of a CIP Task Force that, over the next few months, will 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. We should look for opportunities to standardize school designs in order to shorten the planning period. We should look for ways to implement systemic upgrades in order to lengthen the useful life of school facilities.

Further, the Task Force should thoroughly review the criteria that comprise the current FACT scores. The Superintendent's Recommendation presumes that the FACT criteria will be used without change. But we cannot use the FACT criteria without a better understanding of the factors used and their effect on the order of schools to be modernized.

4. The Board should obtain complete answers to its questions from the November 11 and 12 hearings

Finally, we are concerned that the Board did not receive comprehensive answers to its questions from the hearings. In particular, we would like to see more complete answers to these questions:

- Changes made in the line item for Current Replacements/Modernizations. FY 11 and 12 numbers increased with no new projects added to the list and no modernizations accelerated into this time period. MCPS's response to the Board's questions did not explain the reason for the increased cost, and did not disclose the project by project estimates behind this line item. Given that MCPS routinely discloses these project by project estimates to the County Council, it is egregious that MCPS failed to provide them in response to the Board's question.
- Cost to accelerate the design of upcoming projects. The Board's question asking for a cost estimate to complete certain designs within 12 months went unanswered.

- Promethean boards in elementary schools. MCPS' response does not identify the elementary schools that received Promethean boards, nor does it address concerns over the equality of learning for students within the same cluster where some schools use the technology and some do not. We would like to see a clear policy for when elementary schools are eligible for this technology and how these resources will be apportioned among schools.

CONCLUSION

Our objective is simple. We all want to ensure that MCPS provides our students the best opportunities to learn. The projects listed in the CIP contribute directly to student success and we recommend that the Board continue to examine the objectives, the cost and the effectiveness of its capital program throughout the school year.



Kay Romero, President
Montgomery County Council of PTAs

Attachments:

Montgomery County Council of PTAs Capital Improvement Budget Testimony-
November 11, 2009

http://www.mccpta.com/testimonies_dir/CIP_FY_2011_MCCPTA_Testimony_4_.pdf

attachment 1:

http://www.mccpta.com/testimonies_dir/Attachment_1_CIP_FY_2011_MCCPTA_Testimony_planning_experience_2_.pdf

attachment 2:

http://www.mccpta.com/testimonies_dir/Attachment_2_CIP_FY_2011_MCCPTA_Testimony_upcoming_projects.pdf