

Richard Montgomery Cluster CIP Testimony
Montgomery County Council
May 1, 2007

Good evening President Praisner and Members of the Council. My name is John Hall, and I currently serve as a Cluster Coordinator for the Richard Montgomery Cluster, along with Liz Wheeler and Elizabeth Enders.

I want to begin by thanking you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the children in our cluster, and also to thank you for your dedication and service to our community. I want to stress that we appreciate the progress on Richard Montgomery High School here in Rockville, and are also thankful for the commencement of renovation work on College Gardens Elementary School; we are grateful that these critical projects are at last underway and we hope that they will proceed apace. Unfortunately, due to the continual delays in starting construction, the plans for Richard Montgomery lack language laboratories, LCD projectors, and other features to provide the state-of-the-art learning environment for which we have waited many years and which are needed for the students and teachers.

Our uneven experience with these projects and with other recent school renovations in the County has convinced us of the need for a Site Coordinator to oversee such major projects. Turnovers in – or inattentiveness by – architects and project managers charged with ensuring that a school reconstruction or renovation remains on schedule and is completed with all required elements, have resulted in delays, inspection problems, and costly errors or omissions from projects, with parents having to step in and assume the role of project monitors. A more appropriate solution is for the County to require the use of Site Coordinators on major school renovation or reconstruction projects, and we urge your consideration of this request, which has been endorsed by the Montgomery County Council of PTAs.

We likewise support the testimony of MCCPTA in these proceedings, including its endorsement of the Superintendent's Recommended FY 2008 Capital Budget and Amendments to the FY 2007-2012 CIP. We support the schedule and funding for additional capacity, as well as school modernization and repair. Our unified objective is to maintain or accelerate the modernization schedule so that every child in the County will attend school in a safe, secure, modern facility.

At the same time, we need to highlight for you some issues regarding the CIP, in addition to the Site Coordinator position I mentioned. Most fundamentally, we are concerned about proposals to offset some of the \$20 million education gap in the County Executive's proposed Operating Budget by moving \$12.5 million from the CIP to the Operating Budget. We have been to this movie before, and the ending is always the same – further delays and cost growth in long-awaited projects, such as Richard Montgomery's reconstruction.

Additionally, we regret the CIP determination to drop consideration of badly-needed additions at Beall Elementary School and Twinbrook Elementary School, two schools that are each well over 50 years old, and which together account for nearly half of the 22 portables in the entire cluster. Although MCPS believes that Beall currently has 619 students and was forecast to have less than 600 this year, the fact is that there are actually over 630 attending the school; Twinbrook's true enrollment likewise exceeds both the stated "actual" and projected figures for this period. While MCPS' enrollment projections have dropped, actual enrollment in our cluster has not, and these additions remain a necessity.

Again this year, we respectfully request that you consider an amendment for a new gym floor at Beall Elementary School. The gym floor at Beall, as some of you have heard before, was made of a synthetic material that was designed to be cleaned with a solvent that is no longer available due to safety codes. It is now virtually unusable, due to the accumulation of dirt and tackiness of the material; it is also a safety hazard. Please give serious consideration to this long-standing need, and to providing better maintenance for all schools in the County.

Finally, we ask that you take the opportunity as leaders of our community to focus not only on the safety of Montgomery County's school facilities, but on safe access by our children to those schools. Safe pedestrian and bicycle access to school requires ample sidewalks, crosswalks, and traffic control devices. Your leadership and direction in this regard is needed so that parents, students, teachers, and police who are working to provide safe pedestrian and bicycle access to school will achieve meaningful results.

In closing, I want to again thank each of you for your service and concern for our children. The Richard Montgomery Cluster supports MCCPTA's testimony, and we ask that the Council ensure that the CIP is kept on-track by fully funding and appropriately scheduling needed repairs and modernizations. MCPS has caring and dedicated staff members and award-winning programs, but in order for our children to truly benefit from this, we must rely upon you to provide a safe, secure, modern environment for their learning.

Thank you.