

ROCKVILLE HS CIP TESTIMONY

Good evening. I am Laura Berthiaume, one of the Cluster Coordinators for the Rockville Cluster. On behalf of the Rockville Cluster, I would like to first say how grateful we all are for the new Rockville High School. There are a few relatively small items that need to be addressed in finishing up that project, but it is a fantastic facility and we are very proud to have our students in attendance there. We also want to express our gratitude that the Superintendent has recommended a 2010 date for facility planning for an addition at Lucy Barnesley. We strongly encourage the Board to support and fund this important project. And to round out our thanks, we are very much looking forward to the completion this year of the new gymnasium at Meadow Hall. So there are many good things that have happened over the past few years in the Rockville Cluster.

We do have a very specific and rather large request in our Cluster for a change in the CIP as proposed by the Superintendent, and I want to place this request in a broader context for the Board. We believe it is time for the Board to re-examine its prioritization of capacity projects over modernization projects. This County and this school system need to examine exactly how far behind our older schools are getting, and whether the status quo of state of the art facilities in high-growth areas, in contrast to aging and sometimes decrepit facilities in our older neighborhoods, is truly a picture of a school system that deals fairly with all of its students. The Board should ask this critical question: is the result of putting capacity additions first and continually pushing off modernizations down the time line having disparate socioeconomic impacts that harm our poorer neighborhoods and poorer children, however unintentional that may be? I do not know whether I can say this is true, but if it is, then Maryvale Elementary School in our cluster is the case that makes the point. Built in 1969, it serves over 600 students, and it is the one elementary school in our cluster that has not had any major work done to it. The proposed CIP lists a feasibility study to be done in 2012 on modernizing the school. Any actual construction/completion date is beyond the 6 year CIP so it is still listed as TBD. As of two years ago, the Maryvale feasibility study was to have been done this year, in 2007, but that was pushed off, because of a lack of overcrowding. Now another CIP proposes kicking the can down the road, effectively until the next CIP or longer. The priority the Board currently gives to overcrowding means Maryvale will always tend to be pushed to the end of the projects for which money is appropriated

Maryvale is in some ways unique - it is the only in-service elementary school in Montgomery County that was originally built as a junior high school. As a result, unlike almost every other elementary school modernization project, Maryvale does not need more space. If you look at its flat enrollment projections, it is not going to trigger the magic 92 seat number for an addition. In that way, it

is not all that different from many older elementary schools in settled neighborhoods where there hasn't been a lot of growth. Maryvale desperately needs to be brought up to both fire and building codes – and it desperately needs to be better retrofitted to function an elementary school. This school was built with an interior, old-style, open classroom design that is not used, is ugly, and is badly outdated. It is fair to think that if Maryvale were still being used as a middle school, this outdated design and the problems it presents would have already been addressed.

Maryvale's front entrance fails to function as a passive security barrier, which means that parents - and anyone else - can get into the school without ever having to encounter a staff member. Once in, the interior open classroom design permits movement between classrooms that would be hard to track in a Columbine-like incident. The failure to have a safe entrance is not unique to Maryvale - we have many older schools that have no visual line from the front office to a single controlled point of entry. The current CIP proposal, while allocating tens of millions for three new elementary schools, allocates 1.5 million for "the installation of a visitor access system at elementary schools." What does this really mean? It means that it is possible that children who live in developments where the price of a townhome starts at \$600,000 will be enjoying brand new facilities while Maryvale students, with a community FARMS rate that exceeds 60%, will have to be buzzed in to school if they arrive late after a doctor's appointment, like buzzing into a prison. And that is a direct result of the Board's current priorities, which fail to coordinate its capital priorities with the priorities it has so clearly adopted on the operating side, many of which are working to close the gap between caucasian and minority test scores. So the question must be asked, if we are seeking to close the gap, how often is that occurring in facilities that are outdated and unsafe? Maybe, once again, it is only the case at Maryvale, but even if it is only there, that is one school too many.

Even if the Board chooses not to reprioritize its capital budget, we would argue that it requires immediate attention if we closely examine how it measures up under the current priorities:

Under CIP Chapter 3, Objectives 1, 4, and 7, Maryvale is overdue for an upgrade:

- Objective One (Implement Facility Plans that Support the Continuous Improvement of Educational Programs in the School System/ Class Size Reductions): Maryvale is entitled to special consideration. Maryvale is a Class Size Reduction Initiative School, and hosts a Linkages to Learning Program Site, both of which indicate that there is a policy of extra assistance to Maryvale students because they need that assistance to achieve early success. This commitment on the programmatic side has not been met on the facilities side by

ensuring these "focus" students are learning in the best environment, or even a safe one. If we are really committed as a County to these students, shouldn't we adjust the CIP budget line items to adjust for the fact that the current budget scheme unintentionally leaves Maryvale way behind other schools, simply because it is a converted Junior High School?

- Objective 4 - (Provide Schools that Are Environmentally Safe, Secure, Functionally Efficient, and Comfortable). Maryvale is not safe. In addition to failing to meet modern fire and safety codes for an elementary school and having a layout that leaves the children vulnerable to attack and abduction, Maryvale is not comfortable - the open classroom design and other building features means that rooms are often very hot or very cold, which means both staff and children are uncomfortable and not working at their best. It is also highly doubtful Maryvale meets any sort of environmental objectives - its carbon footprint is undoubtedly enormous compared to newer schools with modern bathrooms and sensor lights.

- Objective 7 - (Meet Special Education Program Space Needs/Preschool Special Education Growth). Maryvale does not meet the program space needs for the CAPP program it houses. It did not have a bathrooms update when the program was moved it, and no particular classroom modifications were made at that time. The result is CAPP program children potty training while third graders go in and out of the bathroom.

So, we are making a request that I can almost guarantee you have never heard before. We ask that Maryvale be taken off the modernization schedule. Being on the modernization schedule means that its current unsafe conditions are just ignored, not addressed. Maryvale needs its own PDF (Project Description Form) - in other words, its own line item. Since this does involve safety and security we ask that this be an accelerated and expedited project to be added to the current CIP. Among the other, obvious benefits, a redone interior design could facilitate Maryvale's function as a location for the CAPP autistic program, which is currently functioning under difficult circumstances right now, and provide pre-K and Head Start rooms with the interior bathrooms that the rest of county expects as standard. It would also allow for a wing of the school to be devoted to pre-K through Kindergarten students. Much of the current design would not have to be significantly changed, and we wouldn't want it changed - we enjoy our courtyards and the natural light that comes into our media center from the clerestories. We just want a safe school with a safe entrance that works for our students like it should. Removal of Maryvale from the modernization schedule will both free up a modernization slot for another school, and it will enable the school system to address these urgent safety and security concerns for some of its most at-risk children.

Thank you very much for your attention to our testimony, and we look forward to answering any questions you may have.