

Testimony of Diana E. Conway
Before the Montgomery County Council

March 21, 2005

Good evening Chairman Leventhal and members of the Council. For the record my name is Diana Conway. My husband and I have two daughters at Potomac Elementary School, and a son at Hoover Middle School. I want to personally thank this Council for its interest in this very local issue. While I am sorry it has come to this, I and many others remain grateful for the attention you have brought to our issue.

This testimony was challenging because events keep superceding the scheduled process: so tonight we find ourselves nominally testifying on the Denis Amendment to rebuild Seven Locks ES on its current site, but as you know the Task Force of MCPS and Council staff is reviewing that option as well as many others.

For the most part I welcome this Task Force. Any hesitation to endorse it is cautionary: I hope it not be used to punish communities, schools or students.

I have been a Potomac parent for seven years. In those early hyper-crowded years, there were reading groups in the halls; ESOL classes in the closets; teachers were denied supplies because the supply "corridor" was being used for teaching or testing; there were teacher "stations" wedged between walls of boxes; a large chunk of our library was sealed off by police tape due to leaking HVAC in the ceiling.

In light of this, and of the promises made across time by MCPS, I offer the following list of outcomes that the Task Force should NOT reach:

-- As the hearing on March 7 made clear, Kendale is a non-starter when compared to a new building on the Seven Locks site.

-- Another non-starter is a cluster-wide boundary study of our five elementary schools. Not because the boundaries are especially defensible or rational, but because such a broad study would so delay Potomac's long-promised relief as to effectively throw it into full reverse. Potomac's overcrowding is what started this ball rolling, and at the end of this process it

must be addressed---especially with all-day K around the corner. And of course the other three elementary schools in our cluster, Wayside, Bells Mill and Beverly Farms, could hardly be blamed for objecting loudly to such a study since it would push them out of the CIP queue just as their turns are coming up.

-- It would be equally unacceptable to run a boundary study involving any non-cluster elementary school. Likewise if the funds earmarked for the SLES replacement school were to be reallocated, either outside our cluster and/or in such a way as to leave Potomac's crowding unresolved.

Potomac's demographics have provided a short time-frame to resolve our underlying crowding before we return to the crisis-crowding levels of five-plus years ago. MCPS projections give us about two years of breathing space before that door swings shut. I urge you to make sure that a solution to Potomac's crowding does not fail because of efforts to pit one school community against another.

We look forward to having our elected leaders on the Council and at the Board of Education take on and resolve, once and for all, the crowding issues at PES: a 1949 school whose last CIP dollars were over 30 years ago, when a gym and a series of windowless classrooms were created.

Whether it's a new school on Seven Locks, or some even better and wiser solution, we need to move on. Surely our time has come.

Thank you.