

Cyril W. Draffin
Public Comments to Montgomery County Board of Education
January 11, 2005

In the quest to obtain more funding for school construction in Montgomery County from the state or county taxpayers, it undermines your case to push building an expensive school at Kendale Road that is not wanted by the Seven Locks PTA or the community.

The Seven Locks PTA by over a 2 to 1 majority voted against the replacement school, now they understand the MCPS plans (and most in favor of the replacement school came from Wayside area, not the surrounding community). Over 100 very concerned parents stood to show their disagreement at the November Board of Education public hearing (on the capital budget) and again last week (January 6) at the Seven Locks replacement school facilities discussion (and were so against the MCPS plans that the MCPS officials cancelled the scheduled vote on whether to proceed with Kendale design).

The County guidelines do not support mega elementary schools, but Kendale is being designed for a 740-student core. We understand the County guidelines are 12 acres when building a school at a new site, but Kendale has only has 8 usable acres (due to steep grade and rocky terrain), thus substantially reducing playing fields (which is exactly the opposite of what Mr. Leventhal said last night to Montgomery County PTA when he said exercise was important to student health).

Because no one at the Board of Education is on record as a member of the Board as being against declaring surplus the current Seven Locks site, the community assumes your goal is to get rid of the current Seven Locks School even though our schools are plagued with overcrowding and trailers. The thought of closing Seven Locks Elementary, and ripping apart the community that surrounds the school and taking away the only large recreation area within walking distance for our neighborhood children, has united the Seven Locks community.

From the public's vantage point, your process of supporting plans to expand Seven Locks (which was the official public MCPS position until early 2004) and then suddenly reversing course within less than a month, without any substantive dialog with the community, has created a firestorm of public distrust that is spreading countywide and to state officials.

MCPS's position that they did not want to have a dialog with the PTA or the community, written response from MCPS to the community that they would not provide written answers to our questions in 2004, and avoiding giving the community any detailed financial information, has acerbated the concern. A lack of willingness by the Board to consider alternative paths has created ill will and raises questions of transparency and fiscal responsibility. We stand ready to discuss win-win situations. What do you need from us or your own staff to help you make a fiscally sound decision that is in the best interests of the Seven Locks community and our children?