

**MCCPTA Churchill Cluster Testimony on the MCPS
Superintendent's Recommended FY 2006 Capital Budget
and Amended FY 2005-1010 CIP
given before the
MCPS Board of Education on
November 10, 2004**

Good evening, I am Janis Sartucci, a Cluster Coordinator for the Churchill Cluster of PTAs. Thank you for the opportunity to comment. I am here on behalf of the Churchill Cluster, comprised of 8 buildings, 2 future school sites, 26 classroom trailers and currently educating 6,647 students. Since my testimony last year at this time our cluster has gained 48 students, 2 school sites and lost a classroom trailer.

My testimony this evening will concentrate on the basic needs of our school facilities.

The long line at the Bathrooms

We testified about the condition of bathrooms in our schools last year. We gave examples of the deterioration of these necessary rooms and you funded bathroom renovations, thank you! But, not at our two worst schools. Our middle schools were skipped because they may be modernized someday in the next decade. Our middle school bathrooms ranked the 17th and 28th worst in the county LAST YEAR. How will they hold up under another 10 years of use?

I cannot imagine having a bathroom in my home that does not have hot and cold running water, or has a leaky pipe and saying that I will call a plumber in 10 years. Some of these bathrooms have an overpowering stench of urine. Urine has found its way into cracks in the tiles and maintenance staff report it is impossible to remove the odor.

For these reasons, there are many middle school students who refuse to use the bathroom facilities at school. Many students hold their bladders until they return home at the end of the day.

Two years ago at Hoover Middle School one aging bathroom fixture gave out. A male student using a urinal used his foot to push the flush lever. (Students do not like to touch the flush levers because they are old and corroded.) The water pipe feeding into the urinal was corroded and the pressure from flushing caused the pipe to burst sending full force water across the bathroom. Two floors of the school were flooded before the geyser could be shut off.

I apologize for being so blunt in my testimony but I am at a loss as to how MCPS staff could inspect our middle school facilities and recommend that no renovations are needed until 2014 or later. These bathrooms are ALREADY past their prime. What will they be like 10 years from now? With the number of students that use these middle schools I estimate these facilities have some 2 million flushes ahead of them before they will be renovated. That doesn't include staff, teachers and community members who use the school facilities. Let us be clear, staff bathrooms are in no better shape than those used by students.

Last year, at the intermission to the Hoover school play I heard the following exclamation from a community member in the Ladies Room. She said, "This place is disgusting, I am calling Doug Duncan tomorrow about this." Putting off these renovations for 10 years makes the Board of Education look as if you do not have the best interests of children in mind when making budget decisions.

There are thousands of kids coming through those buildings between now and modernizations in the next decade and a sink that is broken will not spontaneously heal itself. *Please put Hoover and Cabin John Middle Schools on the bathroom renovation list.*

Get the Lead out

The lead levels in MCPS schools remains a serious health concern. It is time to find a solution to this dilemma that allows our children to drink clean water while at school.

Play Fair

School sites that receive modernizations also receive playground equipment. But playground equipment does not always last 30 to 50 years. Often, it must be replaced before a school is modernized. However, the current plan in MCPS is that if a school's playground equipment is removed it will not be replaced until a modernization. The current wait for a replacement playground is over 60 years. This creates a great inequity in school sites.

Cluster Resolutions

At our October 2004 Churchill Cluster PTA meeting the following two resolutions were passed unanimously with all PTAs represented:

1. The Churchill Cluster opposes the transfer of any real property by MCPS countywide until the use of all MCPS portable classrooms or equivalents have been eliminated and the entire affected community has formally determined school needs are being fully met.

2. Be it further resolved, that the formal determination process shall be publicized, open to the public, and include written input and oral testimony from the entire community including, but not limited to: civic associations, PTA and PTSAs, MCPS teachers and staff, homeowner's associations, business leaders and taxpayers.

In the last week, both the Seven Locks and Potomac Elementary PTAs have met and re-affirmed their opposition to declaring school land surplus at this time.

Policy FAA, it's still there

Once again, Board of Education Policy FAA is printed in the

Capital Improvements Plan book. It is still in existence and was even updated in 2003. The preferred range of enrollment numbers still exist and the preferred utilization rate of a school still exists. In the last two years the Board of Education has reviewed, revised, rescinded or created 43 policies. Policy FAA still stands and therefore remains a valid policy for planning purposes.

On May 6, 2004, MCPS told the County Council Education Committee that by the year 2020 the Churchill Cluster will be educating 2,600 elementary students. This number represents an increase in students but does not take into account the on-going development in our cluster and the anticipated development over the next ten years. The current plan is to build a school on the Kendale site. However, because capacity needs are different from the pure number of seats available in a school our elementary schools will still need classroom trailers in 2020. Our elementary schools may need as many as 14 classroom trailers in 2020 based on actual utilization of space.

To keep our elementary schools within BoE Policy FAA guidelines, our cluster needs another elementary school site. This has been my testimony for the last two years but this is the first time I have been able to advocate for an additional building on an existing site. In the past, I have referred to the three closed school sites that exist in our cluster as possible avenues for relief. It is no longer necessary to suggest that a private facility be removed from a former school site. Our cluster now has 6 elementary school sites.

When the new elementary school is completed at Kendale the additional space that our cluster elementary schools need will be ready and waiting at Seven Locks Elementary School. The retention of this site as an operational elementary school will allow all of our elementary schools to operate within Policy FAA guidelines, with recommended enrollment numbers and an efficient utilization rate.

***“They took all the trees
And put them in a tree museum
And they charged all the people
A dollar and a half just to see ‘em
Don’t it always seem to go***

***That you don't know what you've got
Till it's gone
They paved paradise
And put up a parking lot."(1)***

This year marks the first time that I can stand before you and discuss the needs of our cluster and the possible uses of the dedicated school sites that exist in our cluster. At this time last year we knew that our elementary and middle schools were overcapacity but we did not know that two school sites existed in our community. Tonight, we would ask for a thorough evaluation of the potential uses of these sites based on the current and projected enrollment in our community.

We ask that the Board of Education approach this discussion from an offensive position, instead of from a defensive position. It is unfair and unjust that the County Council is asking for school sites. School sites have been entrusted to the Board of Education for the benefit of school children. I was present at the County Council Housing Committee when a Housing Committee Councilmember demanded that the Tilden parcel be declared surplus immediately. To demand the Board of Education to declare school sites surplus for housing purposes is to ask the Board to break the public trust.

Under the Maryland State Code, school sites can be declared surplus when no longer needed for school purposes. I can find no statutory authority that allows the County Council to demand that school land be turned over to the county for other purposes.

Further, there is no statutory authority for dividing up parcels of school properties that have been in existence for decades. The recommendation to declare a portion of the Tilden Middle School site surplus begs the question, what school purpose do trees, grass and dirt serve? The community dedicated this parcel to the school system 24 years ago. It was entrusted to the Board of Education for the benefit of present and future school children. (*Attachment B*)

The Tilden parcel is trees, grass and dirt located at the back of a baseball diamond. It is equivalent in width to the width of the main Tilden school building. It is much wider than would have ever been

required of a driveway onto this site.

To slice off a piece of a school field for housing is a breach of the public trust and will have a chilling effect on all future dedications of land to the public school system. It will also pave the way for the same type of demand from the County Council at our 84 other school sites that are made up of multiple parcels. **Like the Tilden parcel, 64 school of these 84 sites are also made up of parcels that were dedicated to the Board of Education over multiple years.**

PLAR and the need for “healthy” classrooms

Unhealthy conditions translate into classroom trailers that fill up with carbon monoxide each morning and afternoon due to their placement in a driveway; mold growth in and around classroom trailers and in buildings; frayed carpeting covering asbestos tiles; poor lightening or lack of blinds to prevent sun glare; switching classrooms outside without the benefit of a covered boardwalk, coats or umbrellas; classroom trailers without PA systems; 1950's bathroom sinks that are no longer usable and should be appraised on Antique Roadshow; bathroom stalls that are barely functioning; and HVAC systems that no longer function properly leaving rooms either too hot or too cold for teachers to be effective educators and for students to concentrate.

School facilities are an essential service that needs to be provided to the teachers and children in our communities - and the service should be as good as any other we provide for them. This is not an easy job. As a long-term infrastructure program, facilities must be planned, developed, managed and maintained in a professional manner. Decisions regarding facilities must not be subject to politics - and bad decisions cannot be made due to inexperience or neglect in critical links in an all too long chain.

Science classes without lab space

On Tuesday February 12, 2004, the Board of Education accepted the Churchill High School Modernization project. Unfortunately, as has

happened with other modernized schools, as soon as the new building is occupied and operating it is already overcapacity and unable to serve the students enrolled.

When Churchill High School was being constructed compromises were made that changed the size of some of the science labs. It may have been an easy fix on paper but in practice it has rendered these classrooms unusable as science labs. Science labs are to be designed to hold at least 28 students, however some labs at Churchill can only safely hold 21 to 26 students. Churchill is an overcrowded school and so the typical class size for a science lab is 33 students. Which students should be denied the opportunity to sign up for science labs in a school system that considers itself “world-class”?

Attached is a more detailed summary of the impact of the small science labs on the education and safety of the science program at Churchill High School. (*Attachment C*) Is it in the best interest of our students to put them in an overcrowded classroom to do dangerous experiments?

The Multiplication of Additions

We, along with other clusters, are perplexed by the decision-making behind the construction schedule for additions. The CIP does not state a policy for these decisions or a ranking of the additions. Whereas, schools were assigned FACT scores for modernizations a number of years ago; additions seem to pop up in the CIP without a ranking. Every time a new addition is added to the CIP, modernizations slip further away. In this CIP there are at least 6 additions being put on schools that were built in the last 8 years. How does a new school rate an addition when some of our 40 to 50 year old schools will wait another 7 to 15 years for their first construction project since the 1960's?

We can't plan for what we don't know

We have 42% more classroom trailers than at this time two years ago. Where did these classroom trailers come from? Some of them

came from behind closed-door decisions made by MCPS administrators. These decisions were not in CIP books and there was no community involvement in the decision making process. What surprises are in store for our schools this year? It was my hope that there were no surprises lurking and that MCPS would respect their own policy that says that schools should **“operate in an efficient utilization range of 80 to 100 percent of program capacity.”** (Board of Education Policy FAA C.4.b.)

Planning is impossible when Policy FAA is ignored and programs and students are intentionally added to schools that are already overcapacity. Ignoring this policy means that we are forever playing catch-up in our cluster and coming to the Board of Education begging for relief.

Alternatives to Overcrowding

For years our testimony has centered on the information supplied to us by MCPS in the Capital Improvements Program book. We can only testify based on what we know. To our great surprise we have recently learned that 2 vacant parcels of dedicated school property exist in our cluster. We were never able to advocate for the use of these properties in the past because we didn't know they existed. It is troubling that when firms are hired by MCPS to prepare feasibility studies for modernizations and additions that these studies do not take into account all possible alternative solutions.

None of this information has been included in the feasibility studies on our schools. *What else don't we know?* How can we present informed testimony with only partial information? Could these properties be put to good use in our cluster? We have only begun to explore the possibilities.

A diamond in the rough

MCPS has begun an arts initiative in a number of elementary schools. At the same time, a diamond in the rough is being left to rot. It is time to restore the 1,000 seat Old Blair Auditorium and allow the performing arts to be explored and flourish in all parts of the county.

Conclusion

Thank you for your attention this evening and for keeping the best interest of our students at the forefront of your decision making process.

Janis Sartucci
MCCPTA Churchill Cluster Coordinator
Janis_Sartucci@pta.mcps.k12.md.us

Lilo Mitz
MCCPTA Churchill Cluster Coordinator
Lisolette_Mitz@pta.mcps.k12.md.us

1. Big Yellow Taxi, Published 1969 Siquomb Publishing Co. BMI