

**STATEMENT BEFORE BOARD OF EDUCATION
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
Superintendent's Recommended FY 2007 Capital Budget and FY 2007-
2012 Capital Improvements Program (CIP)
November 9, 2005**

**Geoffrey E. Wolfe
West Bradley Citizens' Association
Member Organization in the 6000-family "Save Seven Locks Coalition"**

**Subject: Seven Locks Elementary School – Superintendent's
Recommendation for Additional Funding to Build "Replacement"
School on Kendale Road and Boundary Study**

My name is Geoffrey Wolfe. I am speaking on behalf of the West Bradley Citizens' Association. This association represents the large community directly south of Seven Locks Elementary School. We have joined with over 6000 families to form the Save Seven Locks Coalition. I will make four points.

First, contrary to School Board assertions, our community opposes the Board's plan to close Seven Locks Elementary School and build a large replacement school on Kendale Road. We have registered strong opposition since Spring 2004 when Superintendent Weast surprised our community by reversing plans underway, 2000 – 2004, to expand and modernize Seven Locks Elementary. We have been denied due process on a decision that will change, fundamentally, the nature of our neighborhood. That said, it is not too late for the School Board to reconsider and reject the Superintendent's costly plan. We ask that you do so now -- before proceeding this next month to cut down almost ten acres of trees along Kendale Road!

Second, we oppose the possible "surplusing" of the Seven Locks property or declaring any school land surplus. When explaining the rationale for his "flip flop" on Seven Locks in 2004, Superintendent Weast cited, as one reason, the request from County Executive Douglas Duncan to identify school property that could be declared surplus and used for affordable housing. Why close or surplus any school when there are more than 17000 County students in portables? Why close Seven Locks when MCPS data show that most elementary schools in the Churchill Cluster and many elsewhere will "exceed capacity throughout the six-year CIP period"?

Third, the boundary study for Seven Locks Elementary should include more of the Seven Locks community, not just the two school districts proposed in the CIP, and it should assure full, timely community participation. For example, in terms of the scope of the study, why not include adjacent Bells Mill Elementary since many Bells Mill students are parked in eight portables? If MCPS must build a new school on Kendale, that school might serve primarily students from the Potomac and Wayside area. The existing Seven Locks Elementary could relieve overcrowding at Bells Mill and serve

the children of the large number of new families who are moving into our neighborhood and replacing the retirees that first built most of the homes along the Seven Locks Road corridor.

To help assure full and fair review of relevant options in this boundary study, we ask that the School Board – particularly given changes in such Board procedures as the FAA – make clear how and when the community will participate in a study that will affect our whole neighborhood. We do not want the fate of our children’s education and our neighborhood determined arbitrarily by MCPS -- as happened in the precipitate change in plans for Seven Locks Elementary. We demand a voice and a choice!

Finally, as taxpayers, we ask that you provide the County Council and us with complete cost data before MCPS rushes to award construction contracts for the Kendale facility in December. That data should include the full updated cost of the proposed replacement school on Kendale Road, both construction costs and other costs related to the project such as road work. After all, taxpayers must pay the whole bill, not just the MCPS part of the bill! The data should provide detailed explanations of items now labeled “lump sum” so that all can understand, for example, the actual cost of environmental remediation on the Kendale site to comply with the strong concerns registered by the County Planning Board. The data should specify what the Superintendent is seeking in the FY 2007 appropriation for both the main school building and the gymnasium (since we now understand that funding for gymnasiums comes from a separate gym account).

The **final price tag for the Seven Locks “replacement” school** – everything from the huge storm water management system for the Kendale “flood area,” to widening Kendale Road and addressing major safety issues there – **may well exceed \$20 million.** That figure is a far cry from the \$12,051,000 touted as the “construction cost estimate” in the presentation document provided to the School Board, public and County Council in Spring 2005. We thus continue to request, as a valid point of comparison to the Kendale project, a detailed estimate of the most efficient addition and combined addition/modernization for the current Seven Locks School. Why not save more than an estimated \$10 million by accepting the option (addition only for Seven Locks Elementary) favored by most of the Seven Locks community? If the lack of accountability on Seven Locks typifies overall management of our public schools, no wonder the Superintendent Weast seeks a 26 percent increase in spending!

Bottom line: We ask that you save Seven Locks Elementary School and thus save money for serving children throughout Montgomery County!

Contact information:
Geoffrey Wolfe
9009 Charred Oak Drive
Bethesda, MD 20817
301-365-2347