

Board of Education CIP Public Hearing
November 10, 2010
Testimony by Ilaya Hopkins
** Version for reading **

My name is Ilaya Hopkins. I am testifying on behalf of the Rosemary Hills PTA but, like many in the room, I am impacted by these discussions in multiple ways. I am the mother of a Rosemary Hills 2nd grader as well as an NCC 5th grader and I live in East Bethesda.

First let me thank the staff and Board for taking up these complicated matters. The PTA submitted a position paper prior to the work session that highlights the unique aspects of our school. We are well aware that in these long-range capital planning discussions, it is our students who will be impacted both in the interim and in the out years and we want to ensure that they benefit from the decisions we make.

Overcrowding is the pressing problem to address in the CIP. Therefore, our top issues are:

- 1) Supporting a second middle school in the BCC cluster and
- 2) Simplifying the current paired elementary school arrangement.

While the PTA agrees with the superintendent's recommendations overall, without real commitment to address the overcrowding, the cluster and all of our students will suffer. This impacts the ability to attract and retain quality teachers and diminishes the reputation of our outstanding schools which is the cornerstone of Montgomery County's quality of life and competitiveness.

While interrelated, our issues need to be handled separately:

- 1) At the Middle School level, we need more space urgently.

With middle school reform and reduced resources, a second middle school in our cluster is necessary to accommodate all the students in the appropriate setting.

Without a plan for more capacity, we will be in moratorium on July 1, 2011. No wants to see that happen._

- 2) At the Elementary School level, fixing the anomalies of our paired school pattern is long overdue.

Students at RH articulate to three different schools, creating an incredible burden on teachers and staff and making it confusing and disruptive for these young students.

Reassignment of some RH students to BE – to be studied per alternative #3 - could help relieve some of the overcrowding at RH and NCC in the very short term, especially since relief from additions will take years to realize.

Our PTA asks the Board to:

- Approve concurrent studies to be started as soon as possible for
 - the site selection and feasibility of a new middle school and
 - a simplified articulation for RH/BE as described in alternative #3
- Commit to support the hundreds of 6th graders who will go through the Chases until a reasonable long-term solution can be found

MCPS has a student population twice that of my entire home town. It is a complex place to plan and administer, especially in this budget climate.

But problems unaddressed do not resolve themselves. In fact, given the continued pressure to develop around transit areas like the BCC cluster, these challenges become increasingly difficult to manage much less solve.

We are eager to work with you to move beyond the decisions implemented decades ago to forge a better solution as soon as possible to reduce the overcrowding of our schools.