

Testimony – Board of Education Hearing on the '04 Budget Cuts  
Wednesday, October 8, 2003; 5:30 pm  
Mary Filardo, 21CSF, Executive Director.

## **Testimony 1**

First of all I urge the Board of Education to acknowledge publicly that the Mayor and the Council have funded public education at higher levels, in real terms than the city has seen before. This is true on the operating side, but it is particularly true on the capital side. The Mayor and the Council have authorized in excess of 1 billion dollars for capital projects for the DC public schools. The school system has no obligation to pay off the bonds used to finance construction—these are paid for by the District government out of its general fund. This does not mean that DCPS has sufficient funds to do all that needs to be done, either on the operating budget or the capital, but it would give the board more credibility and be a step towards the possibility of reasonable relations between the city and the schools and of working together to find more funds.

Second, I urge the Board of Education to accept the \$21 million in increased funding for FY2004. These funds are critical to the local schools that would bear the brunt of the teacher raise.

Third, I urge the Board of Education to take its medicine. The reason the Council is asking for line item authority is because the BOE was incapable or unwilling to take responsibility for aligning the budget with the Mayor's mark in a timely way and its actions—to unilaterally abrogate all labor contracts--represented irresponsible decision making on the part of the Board and threatened the stability of the city. Again, it is not simple. The MOU proposed by the Council and Mayor is extremely one sided, but the BOE needs to work in good faith on this, improve what the Council and Mayor have proposed and expand the MOU to include items that may benefit the operation of DC public schools. I have brought a list of suggestions that are just meant to get discussion in this way by Board members.

## **Testimony 2**

One of the recommendations the 21<sup>st</sup> CSF made in its testimony concerning the capital budget is to use facilities and capital planning to make savings on the operating side.

One area, which the school system has begun to make improvements in, but which needs to continue and intensify is the placement and maintenance of high quality special education programs in the new or modernized schools. These programs should be well

supported and publicized so parents know about their existence and may opt for these over seeking legal help for private placement.

The 2004 budget includes a \$2 million increase for utilities. The Department of energy estimates that schools spent nearly 25% too much for their utilities. This can be reduced by changing behavior, improving systems, and ultimately by designing efficiencies into modernized projects and new buildings. But for this year, the Alliance to Save Energy has a proposal to work with students and teachers to modify actions to save energy. This is a low cost and educational program that should be started immediately. It will help the schools and in fact helps families, as children learn about conserving energy at school and at home. Other work that can have an immediate impact is in working with building engineers to ensure the controls on their systems are in good order and that they have help, if they need it to regulate the heat in their buildings. Johnson Controls or other heating and cooling systems specialists can work with engineers on this. The cost for the training and assistance would be more than saved during the heating/cooling seasons.

Finally, McKinley is nearing completion, while the 21csf has been a leading opponent to school closings and consolidations, we have consistently taken the position that these could not be done where students ended up in worse conditions, as happened in the closings in 1993, 1995, and 1997, but that closing and consolidation need to part of a modernization program and through a comprehensive plan to modernize schools, the total amount of space utilized by DCPS could be reduced to reflect its declining and changing enrollments.

A committee should be established that explores relocating Banneker at McKinley, MM Washington at McKinley, swing space for SWW at McKinley, even perhaps Ellington at McKinley. The students in each of these city wide schools are in some of the worst buildings in the city, with some of the most aspiring youth and educators in the city. Why shouldn't these schools at least have the opportunity to see and consider whether McKinley is a good home for their school? There are tremendous savings to this scenario. To open McKinley for grades 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> and is proposed, leaves a \$70 million plus school underutilized for two years, as students in these other schools are in substandard space. Enrolling students in McKinley who would have otherwise gone to other DCPS high schools just reduces the funds going to these other high schools. Attracting students away from private schools or charter schools back to the public schools may be fine, but when your own public school students are in schools without working science labs, full service libraries, technology, appropriate administrative or support space, why would your first new HS to open be for other than the students already in DC public schools?

There is potential income from leasing the schools, and enabling the SWW public private partnership move forward. There are also savings as DCPS would not have to operate these buildings, pay utilities, cleaning, maintenance or repairs. These savings can be transferred to McKinley, so it opens up as a fully funded school, not a drain on the system.