

**District of Columbia  
Board of Education Meeting  
Wednesday, April 26, 2006  
Testimony of 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund**

In determining whether to close a school, the Board of Education should consider and debate every one separately and vote on each individually. The Board votes individually on every school modernization project; its responsibility is even greater when a school is being closed. People need to hear and understand every Board member's thinking in these decisions.

Many in the administration, however skilled and well intentioned, are new to the community and have no deep knowledge of the District or much understanding of the fabric of its neighborhoods. We cannot expect them to be as completely invested in the city as are long term residents. We rely on our elected and appointed Board members to provide the balance necessary for good decisions.

Because of an acknowledged lack of capacity within the administration, the school system is relying on a contracted team of outside experts to develop the Facility Master Plan and the closing and consolidations that are a part of it. This team is being required to amass information, analyze it, make assessments and come forward with recommendations within a time frame that is impossibly abbreviated.

Even a thoughtful set of closing and consolidation criteria won't result in good outcomes if the information is insufficient, poorly understood and not carefully considered. Inevitably, assessments and analyses are going to be faulty. Recommendations are very likely to be detrimental to the health of the school system both at the start of school next fall and for years to come. Moreover, no time has been allowed for creative thinking and there has been no chance to work out alternative solutions between and among schools and their communities.

By agreeing to vote up or down on a slate of schools to be consolidated in this fashion, the Board would be setting itself up to anoint unwitting errors in judgment. Doing this may actually delay productive decisions and make it more difficult to achieve the right-sizing that we all agree is necessary. Furthermore, by agreeing to vote on a slate, the Board would appear to be shirking its duty and risks losing the respect of its constituents.

Closing a school is one of the most profound actions the Board can take. It is often an admission of civic failure which will affect the lives of students, parents, teachers, administrators, and neighborhoods for years to come. As the residents who are elected and appointed to look out for the District's long-term interests, it is the Board's responsibility to vote individually on the fate of each school.

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