

Testimony of Jeff Edmondson (21st Century School Fund) at the Mayor's
Hearing on the FY 04 DCPS Budget (2/13/03)

My name is Jeff Edmondson. I worked at Wilson Senior High School where my wife currently is an English teacher before joining 21st Century School Fund.

As Mary stated earlier, we are concerned that, despite some improvements, the Capital Improvement Program in DCPS is not fully under control. Our concerns arise from the "Tier 0" schools project costs and the student enrollment projections Jordan referenced in his testimony. While DCPS claims that the "Tier 0.5" and "Tier 1" schools are on budget, these projects are still on paper only and we fear that the decisions that led to the excessive costs in the Tier 0 schools will be repeated in subsequent projects, consuming resources that are needed for schools further down the list.

Creating and supporting a citizen oversight committee is a cost-effective and politically favorable method for helping to ensure sound management of capital programs. School districts throughout the country undergoing capital revitalization projects similar to the District's long term facilities master plan have established citizen oversight committees. These committees, made up of professional and advocacy volunteers, work to oversee the internal and external control mechanisms that monitor the implementation of the capital plan. Where controls are not in place, the committee can provide concrete and relevant recommendations for how they should be established and sustained.

The 21st Century School Fund recently completed a report that analyzes ten citizen oversight committees throughout the country. The report describes the advantages of establishing a citizen oversight committee, including political, social, and managerial advantages as well as examples of promising practices for developing and implementing a committee. We

encourage the Mayor and City Council to establish a citizen's oversight committee. As school districts throughout the country have shown, establishing citizen oversight committees can build public trust, save precious taxpayer dollars and ensure capital funds are used efficiently, effectively, and equitably.

We have gained many insights from our research of citizen oversight committees and would be happy to provide assistance in establishing one for the DCPS Capital Improvement Program.