

**Testimony for the DC Council 3/6/03 Public Hearing on the DC FY 2003 Budget
Submitted by Jordan Spooner, Director for DC Programs, 21st Century School Fund**

I'm here today to speak about our concern for the performance of the school system's facilities maintenance operations. Our concerns fall under two major areas: funding – specifically, the lack of funding that has been budgeted to perform even the most basic of maintenance functions in comparison to industry standards; and planning – specifically the lack of a comprehensive plan, and the lack of an effective process for involving the public and the local school in developing one.

On the issue of funding, DCPS budgeted approximately \$17M for facilities operations and maintenance in FY03, which we estimate works out to little more than \$1 per square foot. This is in comparison to a recommended industry standard for facilities maintenance budgeting of at least \$2 per square foot in buildings already in good repair. Almost everyone in DC familiar with recent school maintenance problems knows that lack of funding is the chief reason, but the industry standard comparison helps to really put it in perspective. Another important item of information we recently learned is that DCPS Facilities recently reported that they had committed over half of their operations and maintenance budget in FY2003 in well under half of this year, and that they had no contingency funding. It is critical that DCPS fund maintenance and operations at a higher level in order to cover simply basic functions.

On the issue of planning, there has not been a comprehensive maintenance plan in DCPS for a long time. We know that they are now in the process of developing one, and commend DCPS for doing this, but we are concerned about the current lack of public involvement in the process. For instance, we have repeatedly asked for a copy of drafts in progress, but have been denied. There are a wealth of community and professional resources that are available to assist

the facilities office in developing an excellent plan, but DCPS apparently doesn't want this help. We are currently working with a number of children's health and environmental organizations that stand ready to provide assistance. DCPS should use every avenue available to ensure that the maintenance plan forms a real basis for keeping our schools healthy and safe environments for our children.

Lastly about maintenance planning, we recently learned that DCPS apparently paid Jacobs Facilities \$433K in August of last year to develop a maintenance and safety plan. We are wondering what the relationship is between that plan and the new one that is being developed, and the dollars spent, and we think this bears some inquiry.

Thank you for your attention.