

Mayor's Hearing on the District of Columbia Schools 2003 Budget
February 19, 2002

My name is Nancy Huvendick, I am the DC Liaison for the 21st Century School Fund. I am a 25 year resident of the District, I've lived in Ward I for most of that time. I have two children, one a sophomore at Wilson High School, the other a 6th grade student at Oyster. I'm speaking here tonight because all of our neighborhoods need fully modernized public school buildings that we can take pride in. But specifically, I'm concerned about the need to keep our schools clean, repaired and well equipped.

1. Custodial Services My younger son and his classmates are proud of their new school. So are Ms. Huntley and Mr. Jordan, and Ms. Viajes, our custodians, who are doing their best to keep the building clean and in good working order. But at the old Oyster, they had the almost impossible task of trying to keep a healthy, orderly and pleasant environment in a school with crumbling plaster, peeling paint, iffy plumbing, makeshift wiring and decrepit furniture and equipment. After working in an old school, they know that a building can't be allowed to accumulate decades of grime, and that small repairs have to be made before they become major problems. Right now, the District's schools are almost all either old or middle-aged. While we wait for modernizations, our schools can only be acceptable learning environments if they are scrubbed and in reasonable repair.

Unfortunately, funds that pay for custodians are still being allocated as part of the weighted student formula. This represents a continued cut in funding for custodial services. Worse, it sets up an insidious school-level conflict forcing principals to choose between building operations and educational programs. Funding for custodians should be allocated, based on the size, condition and age of the building as well as on the intensity of daily use, taking into account both student enrollment and the volume of community use.

2. Maintenance and Repair Funding for maintenance this year was one of the things cut by DCPS to reduce the projected deficit. Therefore, it is even more important that maintenance and repair requests for Fiscal Year 2003 be fully funded because, in part, this should make up for maintenance that didn't get done this year. We have to keep reminding ourselves that past failures to keep what we have in good working order is a large part of why we are faced with unprecedented capital budgets now. Diligent, careful, spending for maintenance and repair will go a long way toward realizing the Facilities Master Plan that puts newly modernized school buildings in every District neighborhood - - and keeps them in good repair.

3. Furniture, Fixtures and Equipment Schools need desks, chairs, science lab tables, art room tables, pianos, kilns, copiers, office furniture, library fixtures, kitchen equipment and so on. All of these things are substantial investments lasting often times much longer than the fourteen years each of our children is in school before graduation. At present, none of these items are provided for in the budgets for our new capital projects. Procedural rules at present determine that these items come from the operating budget, which is stretched thin already. We need to change these rules so that we can plan ahead and open our new and modernized schools with new furniture and equipment.

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