

Testimony of 21st Century School Fund
Board of Education Hearing on the Proposed Capital Plan for FY 06-11
February 2, 2005

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SUPPORT FOR OPTION D1: FASTER HELP FOR ALL OF OUR BUILDINGS

Generally, the 21st Century School fund supports option D1. The District really has no other choice but to scale back the scope of the modernizations and put more money into upgrading every one of our buildings as soon as we possibly can.

EDUCATION STILL HAS TO DRIVE FACILITIES

However, we still have to make certain that the capital plan is driven by education not by facilities. The users have to control the architects so that the educators and the community drive the planning. Systemic rehabilitation has to occur within the context of educational plans. Option D will not get every school up to an absolutely optimal level, it will not add new gymnasiums or cafeterias, but it should produce schools to which we can proudly send our students.

It is important that DCPS expand the definition of systemic rehabilitation to address many of building's educational shortcomings while we replace roofs and boilers and make sure that our schools are cleaner, brighter, more comfortable places. During rehabilitation we can adapt spaces to effectively serve many of the educational functions that individual schools may lack: media centers, art rooms, music rooms, better office space. It would be irresponsible to do otherwise.

OUR OLDER BUILDINGS MUST BE VALUED

We must remember the value inherent in our existing buildings because this core infrastructure - - except for many of the 1970's, open-plan schools - - was built to extremely high standards. Scaling back the scope of modernizations on those solid old buildings scheduled for modernization - Cooke, Hardy, Sousa, Wheatley - - could provide more funds for rehabilitation in more of our open-plan buildings. It is these open-plan buildings which provide the worst educational environments for our students. Even some of those schools set for systemic rehabilitation might be scaled back to help free up funding for open-plan schools

OVERALL PLANNING FOR EACH SCHOOL IS IMPORTANT

The potential criticism of changing from the total modernization scenario to much broader systemic rehabilitation is that we are tackling the problem in a piecemeal manner that will be inefficient and more expensive in the long run. This does not have to be the case. The success of the rehabilitations depends on (1) how well component replacements and small capital projects are coordinated with an overall educational and facilities plan for each school, (2) sensible, not extravagant, execution, and (3) sharing of resources. In this way we can also incorporate earlier upgrades and capture the value put into previous replacements rather than completely starting new.

We can look to Prospect Learning Center, officially opened today, as an example of how we can bring our buildings up to standard in a very cost effective manner. Prospect started with a solidly built old building (1959): windows were replaced, flooring was replaced, electrical fixtures were replaced, new boilers were installed, and class rooms were adapted as specialized therapy rooms for special education - - all for roughly 5 million (that total will increase somewhat as the work is

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finalized). This was done in cooperation with a principal who has long experience with the needs of special education students. Had the project management been entirely in-house rather than through the Army Corps, the cost would have been substantially reduced.

INCENTIVES FOR SHARING SPACE

One lost opportunity at Prospect was in sharing space and planning the whole block with the new Sherwood Recreation Center next door. Rather than share parking with the Rec Center, Prospect's parking lot severely limits the size of the children's outdoor space. Similarly, the Rec Center could have benefited greatly from easy access to Prospect's playground. Instead of a generous play space and a single parking lot, there are redundant parking facilities that are fenced off making for greatly reduced play area both for Prospect students and for the neighborhood.

We have to create incentives for sharing all sorts of resources, and reward those schools already sharing space: co-locations with high school "Stay" programs, charter schools, swing space, administrative space, city agencies. Many DCPS schools have already started doing what needs to be done in co-locating facilities and they should be rewarded with facilities improvements. Their knowledge of how best to coordinate space should be made available to other schools.

Plans for schools undergoing modernization and systemic rehabilitation should be examined to see where it would be appropriate to share space with other city partners, charter schools, non-profit agencies - - and recreation centers.

SCHOOL-BY-SCHOOL SCHEDULE OF IMPROVEMENTS

Option D-1's list of small capital projects and component replacements would be more useful if it were itemized school by school with the outlays assigned annually. This is important first, because doing so indicates to the mayor and the council that these are real projects that can be fully justified.

Second, and more importantly, each local school community deserves to know what is planned for their building and when they can expect the work to be done. They need real information for their educational planning. We should build on previous lists for these small capital projects and component replacements so that schools do not feel disenfranchised. At the very least, set a date in the near future when this information will be provided.

SENSIBLE REPLACEMENTS

We have to be smarter about the scope of small capital projects and component replacements. Often, windows can be quickly and simply re-glazed and painted for another ten years service, existing wood floors can be refinished, lighting fixtures can be disassembled and washed and replaced with new ballasts and brighter bulbs, walls and woodwork painted, carpet replaced. Much more than the 6 million allocated needs to go toward these interior finishes and improvements that can quickly make our teaching spaces more pleasant.

MORE ACCOMODATIONS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

With the need to bring special education back into our schools, more should be allocated to ADA upgrades and small capital projects that will accommodate special education.

A real, detailed facilities plan for special education projects should be incorporated into the Facilities Master Plan based on educational specifications and developed in conjunction with a taskforce that includes special education parents.

MAKE NEW LIBRARIES DEMONSTRATION MEDIA CENTERS

At present, the libraries in our new schools are equipped with new furniture, shelves and work space but very little in the way of books, many need more computers too. This year's surprise congressional appropriation of 6 million in matching library funds for elementary schools might be used to supply the libraries in our new schools with books and cover full time librarians for several years, thereby creating real demonstration media centers that can set a standard to be replicated. The match could be the capital already expended in the modernizations.

TASK FORCE OVERSIGHT FOR CO-LOCATIONS, SPECIAL EDUCATION, LIBRARIES

Like the task force suggested for special education, similar task forces could be organized to look at co-locations and specialty spaces such as media centers.

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