

Testimony
Public Hearing on the DCPS 2009 Operating Budget
Thursday, November 15, 2007
825 N. Capital St., NW, 5th Floor

My name is Nancy Huvendick. I represent the 21st Century School Fund, a small non-profit based here in the District who's mission is to improve urban public school facilities. I am also proud to be a DCPS parent with one child through the system and almost ready graduate from college and another who is a high school senior.

Safe, Clean and Attractive Buildings Mean a Stronger DCPS

Good, on-going maintenance and custodial work will go far to attract students back into what we expect will soon be an efficient and effective public school system with a stable and reliable central administration.

Maintenance & Repair Planning, Management and Budget

Custodial work and maintenance are not just technical matters that can be handled with an occasional blitz or a one-time contract. They need to be respected as part of the daily life of the school with all the central support that is required both from DCPS and from OPEFM, the new Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization.

We need a maintenance and management operations plan for next year that can keep our buildings in repair, our school yards and grounds well kept and energy consumption under control. Using a "Blitz" repair program to catch up on a huge backlog of work orders attests to years of maintenance under-funding. It does not build capacity within the system for carrying out the day-in-day-out work of regular, routine maintenance. We expect that a well planned program of maintenance and repair for DCPS buildings and grounds will be fully covered in the budget under OPEFM.

Maintenance and repair needs to be set at a minimum of \$2 per square foot – just for maintenance and repair, not custodians - - which would be about \$30 million annually for our current 15 million square feet of space. Arlington, for instance, spends about \$3 per square foot on maintenance and repair, a level of expenditure that would require about \$45 million annually for DCPS facilities.

The maintenance budget should NOT be covered with modernization funds.

Local School Priorities and Oversight

Planning the scope of school-level maintenance and oversight for the quality of the custodial work, maintenance and repairs logically falls to the local school – they are the closest to the buildings and are most immediately affected when upkeep and repair is not

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adequate. We would like to work with DCPS and OPEFM on a process by which the local school becomes the primary focus for prioritizing building improvements.

Utilities

The cost of utilities has been climbing drastically. Local schools need assistance and incentives to conserve energy and water. But this won't happen unless DCPS finally hires an energy management director, with broad latitude to work with local schools and with OPEFM. Our utility consumption and costs can be cut at least 15% with just behavior changes and can be reduced further if building improvements are made with conservation planned in.

Custodial Budget

We have consistently under-funded custodians so that we do not have the number of people required to keep the buildings clean. We are still staffing based on the number of students in our buildings rather than on the number of square feet in the building. As a result we are not being good stewards of these neighborhood-based capital assets. Custodians should be budgeted at a minimum, in old buildings, at 1 person for every 20,000 square feet. If we don't increase the custodial allotment we will rapidly lose the headway made with the blitz.

Transparent Budgeting

We hope that DCPS and OPEFM will circulate their draft budgets widely so further public comment can inform the requests before they are transmitted to the Mayor. In this way, a plan can be developed that the public can support when the time comes for budget hearings at the Wilson Building.

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