



Better Buildings: Better Schools

Issue 21 (August 2004)

*Monthly news on DC Public School facilities from the 21st Century School Fund (21CSF), a Washington DC based, nonprofit - **working to build the public will and capacity to improve urban public school facilities.** To subscribe or unsubscribe please email: newsletter@21csf.org.*

DCPS Capital Budget Reallocation

The District of Columbia government has agreed to fund DCPS with \$714 million in capital funds for the six year period covering FY2005-2010 – designating \$173 million of that money for FY2005. \$714 million is considerably less than DCPS needs to continue a comprehensive modernization program the way it was planned at the beginning of this massive program in 2000 when 52 schools were ranked for modernization into Tiers 0, .5, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

There will be a hearing on the FY2005-10 Capital Improvement Budget Reallocation on Thursday, September 9, 2004 from 6:30-9:00 pm at the Board of Education, 5th Floor Board Room, 825 N. Capitol Street, NE. Please call the Board of Education at 202-442-4284 by 3:00 September 7 if you want to be placed on the speakers list. A copy of the capital budget is available at www.21csf.org.

As reprogrammed, next year's \$173 million has been divided up so that 64% goes to 12 schools in Tier .5, Tier 1 and Tier 2 projects, and 25% goes to small capital projects (electrical upgrades, etc.), component replacements (roofs, windows, boilers), mandates (asbestos removal). 11% (\$19 million) is designated generally for DCPS information technology (software, computers and computer systems) over one year.

Twelve unoccupied schools in construction will get more than half of the capital money for the entire system next year, thus leaving very little repairs that would make daily life better for students in all the remaining 150 schools, i.e. painted classrooms, new carpet, and windows that can actually be seen out of.

21CSF generally supports a reallocation that would scale back the scope of modernizations to make the projects simpler and cheaper. We also recommend that structurally sound schools, such as Birney and Woodson, not be torn down but rather be upgraded with a simpler, and much less expensive, renovation. In a system that is losing students, we don't need a few bigger, fancier schools. We need lots of really decent neighborhood schools.

Look for Changes on the Playgrounds

This year Congress earmarked a windfall \$4 million to be spent on DCPS playgrounds. About 80 of the 100 elementary schools in the system will see some changes on the playgrounds. At some schools already existing playground equipment will be repaired; new and repaired fencing and lighting will be added at other schools. About 30 schools will receive all new playground

equipment installed on top of new soft rubber fall surfaces. Please let us know what type of improvements you see in your neighborhoods or on your child's elementary school playground.

Closings and Consolidations

Thirty-two DCPS elementary schools had enrollments last year of 300 or below – that means about 1/3 of DC's elementary schools are very small. While a handful of those schools are in small buildings at full capacity, most of the small schools reflect steadily declining enrollments. Meanwhile, new charter schools have experienced increasing enrollments at about same rate that DCPS public schools have been losing students.

The Board of Education is now faced with the unhappy prospect of closing and consolidating schools. At the same time, DCPS Facilities has been tasked with helping individual charter schools quickly locate much needed space. Regulations covering school closings exist, but they are in need of a major overhaul as they do not give schools and communities reasonable time either to restructure or to plan an organized move.

So far, the system of notifications and hearings that are in place has not been followed carefully and Board of Education rules have been waived repeatedly. Schools have not been given time to plead their case for remaining open and autonomous, nor have they had time to plan any sort of transition for students and teachers. Charter schools promised space have equally been left in a lurch and had to scramble to change plans at the last minute. First at Evans where Maya Angelou charter school is co-locating, then at Van Ness which fought back a closing initiated in April, and now at Elliot where a co-location has been suddenly required for the coming fall, the schools have had insufficient notification of imminent changes.

In each case, those most affected by the change – namely the schools and neighborhoods – were not consulted during negotiations. Given time and an orderly process, wrenching and debilitating transitions could have been turned into positive partnerships benefiting all of the entities involved. Now that rent from co-locations with charter schools must be returned directly to the host school, a DCPS school with a dwindling population could improve its programs and facilities with the increased income – or even share staff with the charter.

DCPS Re-Opens Three Schools This Fall!

DCPS will re-open three schools in September: Cleveland Elementary School (significant renovations), Kelly Miller Middle School (brand new facility) and McKinley Technical High School (significant renovations). Please visit www.21csf.org to view photos of these facilities.

Cleveland Elementary School (1825 8th St., NW/Shaw Howard Metro/Ward 1) is an historic 1938 school that has been completely renovated with a new 3 story addition that includes a new gymnasium. The new school has capacity for 360 students. Last year's student population was 209 in Head Start through 5th grade. It is expected that the new building will attract students who might otherwise move to charter schools or private schools. Principal Annie Mair and her staff will be moving back into Cleveland soon after being in swing space at Lewis Elementary for three years.

Kelly Miller Middle School (215 49th Street NE/Benning Road Metro/Ward 7) will start out primarily as a 7th and 8th grade school since nearly all of the feeder elementary schools are holding on to their 6th grade classes. The new building replaces the old Kelly Miller Jr. High School that was built in 1949.

The school includes both a large auditorium and a gymnasium, fully equipped labs, generous instrumental and choral music rooms, a new art room with a kiln, a light filled cafeteria, a small media center and all the offices and support space expected for a comprehensive middle school.

Robert Gill, former principal of Johnson Jr. High School, has just been appointed principal. He is being assisted in opening the new school by LeGrande Baldwin, long-time administrator at DCPS and former principal of Kelly Miller when it closed in 1997 and the students moved to Evans. Registration for in-boundary students is still taking place; feeder schools are Aiton, Benning, Burrville, Drew, Shadd and Smothers.

McKinley Technical High School (101 T Street NE/the future New York Ave. Metro/Ward 5) will open in marvelously renovated space at the historic McKinley High School. It includes a beautiful media center, numerous well equipped labs, a greenhouse, a cafeteria with a court yard, a grand auditorium and a huge gymnasium – all on a hill with a commanding view of the city. Principal Dan Gohl will officially open the school at a ribbon-cutting ceremony August 17th at 10:00 am.

The school's capacity is 800 (one wing of the huge building remains vacant), but the new school will start with an expected 400 students in 9th and 10th grades, adding 11th grade next year and 12th grade the following year. McKinley is a magnet school that has no neighborhood boundaries. General registration continues (<http://mths.k12.dc.us/>); the application deadline has been extended.

The curriculum focuses on bioscience, information, and broadcast technologies in the first two years of study. Students then select an in-depth pursuit so that they finish high school with a mixture of internship, early college, and traditional high school classes. Admission standards are high, and graduates will be prepared to perform at the highest academic and professional levels.

DC Voice – Ready Schools Project 2004

DC VOICE has launched a *Ready School Project* focusing on the systemic supports that need to be in place so that all students receive quality teaching and education. After school is under way, parents and community members will work in teams to visit at least 40 schools and conduct a checklist interviews with principals, representative teachers and representative parents. The same questions will be asked at each school, i.e.: “Are all staff vacancies filled?” “Is there a book for every child in core subjects such as reading?” “Did staff receive training during the summer?” “Were necessary building repairs done this summer?”

Checklist responses will be tabulated and a Project report will be released in early October. The findings will focus on composite results and will NOT identify or target individual schools. The *Ready Schools Project* is part of DC VOICE's ongoing efforts to build community involvement and foster greater system and public accountability for school and student success. If you would like more information, or would like to get involved, please contact: DC VOICE, 202-986-8535 or dcvoice@dcvoice.org

21 CSF Has Moved!

As of July 1, 2004, the 21st Century School Fund has moved its offices to the historic Thurgood Marshall Center for Service and Heritage. The Thurgood Marshall Center, formerly the Anthony Bowen 12th Street YMCA, is located in the Shaw community/U Street district of Washington, DC. Operated by the Thurgood Marshall Center Trust, Inc. (www.tmcsh.org), the building houses several other non-profit organizations dedicated to community and youth services. We are thrilled about our new environment and welcome visitors to check out our new space!

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Green Line Metro: U Street/African-American Civil War Memorial/Cardozo