



Testimony on FY2003 Capital Budget of DCPS
Mary Filardo, Executive Director of the 21st Century School Fund
April 19, 2002

The District of Columbia Public Schools requested \$327 million for FY2003 and a total of \$1.7 billion for FY2003-2008 from the Mayor to finance the construction and renovation of schools. The mayor indicated that he would only support a budget for FY2003 of \$183 million and a total budget for FY03-08 \$700 million, a 60% decrease.

We are here today to request that the Council authorize \$1 billion for the DCPS FY03-FY08 capital budget, with \$275 million in FY03, so we do not lose the planning and early stages of design of the Tier 1 and Tier 2 projects and so the component replacements and major repair improvements can proceed as planned.

I think it is critical that the District not lose heart. However, I also believe the Council, Mayor and public must become much more actively involved in the oversight and monitoring of the implementation of the capital program. There are a number of indicators that a major audit and reflection on the process, quality and cost of our capital program is in urgent order:

1. From FY1998 through FY2002, the DCPS will have expended approximately \$500 million on school building improvements from the capital budget. However, although progress is being made with eight schools in various stages of construction, not one school will be complete by the end of FY2002.
2. As you can see from the spreadsheet on the back of this testimony, the initial budget for the Tier 0 schools was \$69 million. The current budget for these same schools is \$168 million. This is an average increase of 142 percent.
3. The average cost per square foot for the Tier 0 schools is \$264.
4. A review of bid documents for the replacement of four boilers in a 1400 student high school in Baltimore County revealed that the winning bid to the contractor was \$425,000. However, in the DCPS capital plan, a boiler replacement for Adams ES—a 59,000 SF school-- is estimated to be \$1.1 million.

I have the opportunity to travel and meet with Chief Operating Officers, Directors of Facilities, facility planners, architects, builders, school board members and community leaders across the country about school facility concerns. There is hardly a city or school district that does not establish a public oversight body to monitor the implementation of the capital program at the inception of the program. I know of such bodies in Chicago, Cleveland, Oklahoma City, San Antonio, and Miami-Dade County.

I request the Council or Mayor initiate an audit of the process, cost and quality of the capital projects that have been undertaken since FY1998 and that the Council put a line item of approximately \$350,000 in the District's capital budget to pay for this audit. I also call on the Council and Mayor, as an urgent matter, to work with the 21st Century School Fund and others to establish a citizen's capital program oversight committee immediately.

Testimony of Jordan Spooner, Director for District of Columbia Programs
21st Century School Fund

My name is Jordan Spooner, and I am the Director for District of Columbia Programs for the 21st Century School Fund. I am here today to speak in support of the modernization and replacement plans for the District's 17 high schools, and to urge you to maintain the capital funding at a level sufficient to keep their renovations on track.

In the DCPS Capital Improvements Program, there are three high schools in Tier 0.5 (Bell/Lincoln, McKinley, and Phelps) and two high schools in Tier 1 (Luke Moore and Woodson) for which modernization or replacement work has begun. If the program is funded in FY03 at the Mayor's targeted level of \$183 M, instead of the \$327 M requested by the school system, these high schools and the remaining ones will be facing a massive slowdown in their schedules. For example, McKinley is already significantly behind schedule and over budget compared to its original plans, and this situation will be greatly exacerbated if the capital budget is funded at the lower level. Also, the high schools at the bottom of the list to be modernized are trusting that their turn will come, and if the schedule continues to be delayed, their trust and hope will surely dwindle.

The citizens of the District need to better recognize that our high school buildings are beautiful and historic structures that were once sources of civic pride. Many of them are irreplaceable buildings on large campuses overlooking the city, with broad lawns, playing fields, swimming pools, gymnasiums, green houses, and large and impressive auditoriums. They are evidence that the District once took great pride in the education that it provided its children. Because of the complex and large nature of these buildings, and the fact their average age is 70 years, we will need a major reinvestment to modernize them. For instance, the amount requested by DCPS in FY03 for the three Tier 0.5 high schools is over 40% of the \$183 M set forth by the Mayor.

Its time for the District to do something extraordinary to save our high schools, and to restore them as sources of civic pride once again. Over one third of them were built during the Depression, and we found a way to build them then, so we should be able to find a way to fund their modernization now. In the Depression the solution to the high building costs was federal funding, and the 21st Century School Fund believes that is probably our best solution now. The District needs to specifically request federal help to modernize our high schools. The high schools will not survive without it.

Testimony of Nancy Huvendick, 21st Century School Fund

A SLOW DOWN IN CAPITAL RENOVATION = AN INCREASE IN MAINTENANCE

While waiting for renovation, our schools are full of children and teachers who need a tolerable environment at the very least. Cutbacks in the capital improvement program necessitate equal increases in the maintenance and repair budget. With old, deteriorating buildings it is all the more important to keep them clean, painted, well lit, comfortably heated

and cooled with the grass cut and the trash collected. It's a direct relationship - - the slower the rebuilding, the higher the maintenance and repair costs.

Yet the budget for facilities, maintenance, building engineers, and roving custodians has been steadily decreasing at a tremendous rate:

\$31,997,000 in 2000

\$25,745,800 in 2001

\$19,044,000 in 2002

The budget has dropped by about one third since 2000, and that's without even one rebuilt school. Even with an immense increase in 2003, we still have to climb out of an ever-deepening pit of deferred maintenance.

We've finally provided our custodial workers with a much-needed pay increase, but the number of people employed to keep the schools in good repair are not nearly up to the levels required for upkeep in an aging school system. Contracting these services out has failed in the past. For instance, we have thousands of doors and only seven locksmiths. The school system employed about 200 repair workers in the early 90s, and now we have around 70.

Without renovated schools, it is even more important to put energy into smaller projects such as bathroom replacements, drinking fountains, office renovations, laboratory renovations, telephone installations, computer wiring, playgrounds, etc. These can make an immediate positive difference to educational programs. My own pet concern is windows you can see out of - - about twenty years ago plastic windows were installed in some of our schools. The plastic has since turned an opaque tan making rooms that should be flooded with light feel like basements. Why replace glass now when a school is scheduled for renovation in a few years? Because - - for a modest price - - it will make an immense difference this year to twenty children and their teacher.

Certainly we can use our budgeted dollars more wisely. We should take a hard look at money allocated for technology at McKinley: \$9 million for a school that does not have any students yet and that was presented as a magnet for private dollars. As much as we all would like to see this program succeed, we have to consider the cost more carefully. The Transformation schools provide a wonderful experiment to see what one million dollars will do for nine schools, but we need to concentrate our efforts on ways to make education better at all of our schools. Another obvious center of inefficiency is in special education transportation. Somehow we have to find the energy and creativity to bring costs down from \$5,000 per pupil each year just to get to school.