

# **Myth and Reality:**

## **A Study of Excess Space and Capacity in the District of Columbia's Public High Schools**

### **Executive Summary**

The District of Columbia is in the early stages of a multiyear and multibillion dollar school building modernization and replacement program. As part of this program, District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) is engaged in a separate planning process to clarify how the District's public high schools will be modernized. The high school planning process is multi-phased, including the development of a District-wide framework, individual high school campus plans, and coordination and documentation of these plans.

To better understand the complexities of modernizing the District's older high schools, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund (21CSF) and the Senior High Alliance of Parents, Principals and Educators (SHAPPE) conducted a space study of Cardozo and McKinley Technology senior high schools. Cardozo (built in 1916) is first on a list of thirteen District high schools that are scheduled for modernization or replacement, and McKinley (built in 1928) is the first high school for which modernization work has begun.

The study was performed because of concerns that: (1) DCPS measurements on school building space and enrollment capacity may be too high; and (2) DCPS Standard Education Specifications do not adequately provide for high school program requirements, and meeting these standards will unnecessarily increase construction costs. The findings of the study lead to some interesting and important conclusions which will impact the course of the modernization and replacement program across the city. The specific findings include:

1. The DCPS recorded square footage of the total building space at Cardozo is 22% more than the amount determined by measurements performed for this study.
2. The DCPS Standard Education Specifications for schools of the planned capacity of Cardozo and McKinley (800 students) provide for 34% less usable space (i.e., for instruction, support, and administration) than what exists in the current Cardozo, and 25% less usable space than what will exist in the modernized McKinley. The Specifications do not allow for all of the space that is currently in use and that will also be expected by communities of modernized or replaced schools.
3. Specialty spaces (e.g., auditorium, cafeteria, and armory) account for over 70% of the difference between the usable space in the Standard Education Specifications and the usable space in each of the two schools. These spaces have traditionally been large components of DCPS schools, but are either undersized or not included in the Specifications.
4. The usable space at Cardozo is 50% of the total space, therefore limiting enrollment capacity. The unused space mostly consists of large mechanical spaces and hallways.

5. The Standard Education Specifications provide for many more site facilities (e.g., athletic and recreation fields) than exist at the current Cardozo.

Based on these findings, it appears that the DCPS measurements on space and capacity will need to be revised. It also appears that the current Standard Education Specifications are problematic for modernizing most of the District's high schools, because of their floor area requirements and a current floor area design standard of 192 *gross* square feet per student. These features make the current specifications unsuitable for programmatic support, economical space planning, and project estimating in the modernization of the schools. The Standard Education Specifications and floor space design standard may work for new construction or replacement of a high school, but 15 of the 18 high schools are expected to be modernized.

Due to the findings, 21CSF and SHAPPE have prepared a number of recommendations for DCPS as it moves forward with its high school planning:

- Undertake planned site-specific space and capacity studies at each high school in close collaboration with Local School Restructuring Teams.
- Revise the Standard Education Specifications to allow greater flexibility for individual spaces. This will allow program needs to be met without an expensive demolition of building interiors.
- Modify the floor area design standard value of 192 *gross* square feet per student to encompass a range, depending on program and basic building design.
- Include in currently planned site studies a review of whether structured parking or other improvements are possible to alleviate site constraint problems.

For a copy of the full report, visit the 21st Century School Fund's website at [www.21csf.org](http://www.21csf.org) or contact 21CSF or SHAPPE at the addresses below. This report was made possible through the generous support of the Morris & Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation and the Eugene & Agnes E. Meyer Foundation.

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