

Better Buildings: Better Schools Issue 43 (July/August 2007)

Monthly news and commentary 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/unsubscribe, please email: newsletter@21csf.org

New Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization: A Blitz of Summer School Repairs and Up-Grades

Judging by construction vehicles, late-night activity, and full dumpsters, schools across the city seem to have experienced record construction and repair activity in July and August as the new Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization (OPEFM) continues the “Blitz” repairs. The Washington Post (“D.C. School Repairs: Bigger challenges will follow a summer of results”, Monday, August 27, 2007; A12) reported that about \$80 million has been quickly spent in the effort with construction crews working almost around the clock at many sites in order to get the buildings ready for the first day of school, Monday, August 27. OPEFM Director, Allen Lew is reported to now estimate that an additional \$120 million will be required to cover the accumulated backlog of work orders.

OPEFM and the Modernization Advisory Committee

The new Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization (OPEFM) headed by Allen Lew, who was formerly director of the DC Sports and Entertainment Commission, has held its first meeting with the Modernization Advisory Committee (MAC) set up by the Facilities Modernization legislation passed last year. Members were appointed by the out-going Board of Education and by the Council; the Chief Financial Officer must still make appointments and the Mayor must name a Chairman.

Tony Robinson, Director of Communications for OPEFM, reports that they will continue to meet with the current Modernization Advisory Committee members to establish operating procedures and reporting requirements. After that is done, the MAC meetings will be open to the public as soon as a meeting schedule is set.

Currently the eleven-member Modernization Advisory Committee consists of:

Reuben J. Hameed	BOE Appointee	3 year term
Paul Wolff	BOE Appointee	3 year term
Howard Ways	BOE Appointee	3 year term
Nathanial Saunders	BOE Appointee	3 year term
Peter May	BOE Appointee	2 year term

Mr. Robinson explained that as far as possible, OPEFM intends to conduct its business with open and transparent processes. They will soon have a link on the DCPS website to

provide information on schools undergoing "stabilization" repairs as well as plans for ongoing and upcoming modernization projects.

Additionally, OPEFM expects to hold regular monthly public community meetings with the first tentatively planned for Thursday, September 20th at 6:00 p.m. - - location to be announced. Mr. Robinson explained that the two open public meetings described above as well as mandated hearings before the City Council should provide parents and community members with ample information on progress.

NEW CO-LOCATIONS

This new school year has seen more traditional DC Public Schools and DC Public Charter Schools working out facilities-sharing arrangements where two schools use a single building. In the past, charters have shared space temporarily with DCPS schools with arrangements between Bunker Hill Elementary School and LAMB, PCS, Maya Angelou PCS and Luke Moore High School, and Two Rivers PCS and Eliot Jr. High. But now, several schools are testing out what could develop into permanent co-locations. Last year KIPP PCS Middle School moved in with Scott Montgomery Elementary School and the two schools continue to share the building. This fall, four more public charters will share space with DCPS schools.

Apple Tree Early Learning Public Charter School has opened two newly renovated classrooms for 3 and 4 year-old students this fall at Amidon Elementary School at 401 Eye St., S.W. They anticipate creation of a new early learning play ground area at Amidon as well.

Hendley Elementary School, with 240 Pre-school through 5th grade students last year, will share its annex at 425 Chesapeake St., SE with Septima Clark Public Charter School which has small classes of students in pre-school through first grade.

The 180 student Hospitality High School Public Charter School, moved this year from its down-town home to re-furnished classrooms on the 3rd floor of Roosevelt High School in Petworth. It will remain a DC Public Charter School but will have access to the renovated culinary arts center that was opened in June as part of Roosevelt's Academy of Hospitality and Tourism.

Mary McCloud Bethune Public Charter School opened the school year with several classrooms of 4th through 7th grade students co-locating with Slowe Elementary School at 1401 Jackson St., NE. This expands MM Bethune to a third location in addition to their 5413 16th St., N.W. and 253 42nd St., N.E. sites.

SUCCESSFUL Third Annual DCPS Beautification Day

Neighbors, civic and religious organizations from all around the city and the metropolitan region pitched in on Saturday, August 25th, along with DCPS parents and school custodians to help spruce up the school yards.

This school/community effort has been organized for the past 3 years on the Saturday just before school opens. The idea is to concentrate efforts on school entrance areas and playgrounds to make the schools truly welcoming for students and teachers.

In spite of near record heat, a reported 1600 volunteers worked all morning. They weeded flower beds and trimmed shrubs, mulched trees, planted new flowers, painted exterior doors and swept playgrounds.

The 21st Century School Fund served as coordinator for Ward I schools where the largest projects were tackled at Gage-Eckington and Oyster/Adams. At Gage-Eckington Elementary School, neighbors organized with many other volunteers to turn over the baseball in-field and fill the flower beds with plants donated by Johnson's Garden Center. At Adams - - now Oyster/Adams - - parents continued their summer-long efforts to get the building ready for the 4th through 7th grade students in their expanding dual language program. Volunteers cleared the garden beds and entrance stairs, removing accumulated weeds and grit. Similar work was accomplished at all of the 13 schools in Ward I.

We salute all of those who helped out last Saturday. Please share reports of Beautification Day projects that you know of at schools all across the city –address comments to info@21csf.org, with the subject line “Beautification Day”.

Commentary from the 21st Century School Fund

It is truly wonderful to see schools with new paint, lighting, carpeting and all the effort that goes into getting classrooms clean, bright and inviting for students and teachers. The \$80 million is long overdue. But if this \$80 million had been part of DCPS operating budget for regular, preventive and routine maintenance over the last 5 years, the students, teachers, staff, neighbors and taxpayers would have been far better off. Like the \$46 million roof replacement “blitz” of 1997 and the \$34 million in maintenance and repairs managed by the Washington Gas Company in 2001, this summer's repair program follows in a long line of expensive short term fixes that have real building effects, but are driven by political considerations as much as educational ones. What these “blitzes” do is get some important immediate improvements, but do not build a system that ensures staff and students are in healthy, safe, educationally appropriate public school facilities. This takes time. It takes intention—planning, staffing, and funding.

Hopefully, now that school is open, DCPS and OPEFM, under the guidance of the Deputy Mayor for Education can figure out a system for providing all public school students with high quality public school facilities to support high quality programs.