

Better Buildings: Better Schools, Issue 47 May/June 2008

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

DCPS to Implement Major Reorganization this Summer

This fall, DCPS will have a total of 13 middle schools serving 6th through 8th grade students, completely replacing the jr. high 7th-9th grade structure. 2,200 5th grade students who graduated from 70 PreK-6th grade elementary schools this spring will attend middle schools as 6th graders this fall.

23 schools will be closing: 16 elementary schools, 4 middle schools or junior high schools, 2 special education centers and 1 high school. The closed schools enrolled a total of 4,950 students last year. However, there are only 8 direct consolidations - - where two schools are combined. Since students from 15 of the closing schools have been guaranteed admission in one of several near-by schools, many classrooms throughout the city are expected to welcome larger than usual numbers of transfer students this fall.

There will be 16 new pre-kinder through 8th grade schools are being established, so that in the fall, DCPS will have a total of 22 pre-K-8th grade schools. All but one of these new pre-K-8 schools is in Wards 4 and 5 where less density had formerly required middle school students to travel longer distances.

\$1.36 Billion Capital Budget for DCPS School Facilities Approved by Council

Even though the Mayor's capital budget request for FY 2009-2014 of \$1.36 billion capital budget for DCPS had no project specific detail (except for a \$5 million for a Peoplesoft computer system) the Council approved the budget. The budget provided the total annual budgets for design, site work, project management, construction and equipment for FY 2009 -'14 along with the previous six-year cumulative total of funds authorized of \$1,573,996,000.

Public Seeks a Voice in Facility Planning and Better School Facilities Management: The DC Council Committee of the Whole held a roundtable discussion on "Progress in Modernizing and Improving District of Columbia School Facilities" on Wednesday, June 26, 2008. Witnesses explained the critical need for:

- community involvement (and reasonable notification) in planning
- the importance of continuing with full modernization projects at all DC public schools,
- the importance of learning from past design mistakes (i.e. Woodson High School)
- the need for a structured process for capital planning with clear responsibility for decision-making.

Most of the roundtable involved discussion between Chairman Gray and Allen Lew, Executive Director of the DC Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization (OPEFM). At issue were a number of contracts that require Council approval to re-program capital funding that had previously been allocated to whole school modernizations. Substantial sums would instead be spent this summer for immediate alterations and repairs at newly consolidated schools and schools that are scheduled to serve pre-kindergarten through 8th grade at the opening of school this fall. The Chairman questioned why the council was being asked to approve major policy changes (expanded pre-K-8th schools) only at the point that policy is embedded in construction contracts. Council members also requested more detailed analysis on the contracts.

Testimony is available at: www.21CSF.org .

DCPS Master Facilities Plan Not Public, Not Complete

After a request by Allen Lew of the Office of Public Education Facility Modernization, Council Chairman Gray approved 3 month extension to finish the Educational Facility Master Plan for DCPS. The Master

Facilities Plan, which outlines the framework for public school building modernization and replacement, is scheduled to be completed in September. However, there have been NO public meetings on the planning and none so far have actually been scheduled, although they have been promised by OPEFM.

Planning for Quality Schools: Meeting the Needs of District Families

The Quality Schools and Healthy Neighborhoods Study — a collaborative effort of the 21st Century School Fund, the Brookings Institution, and the Urban Institute, sponsored by the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education will release its Policy Report mid-summer. This report will provide the Fenty Administration with a framework and policy options for a more family friendly city. The Phase 1 Report with basic data and information about all DC public schools is available at www.21CSF.org.

Good Buildings, Better Schools: An Economic Stimulus Opportunity

Our weak economy has prompted discussion of using federal stimulus spending on our nation's school buildings to spur near-term growth by creating high quality jobs. Mary Filardo, Executive Director for 21CSF recently released, "Good Buildings, Better Schools: An economic stimulus opportunity with long-term benefits", a paper written for the Economic Policy Institute and presented at EPI's forum on Investing in U.S. Infrastructure. It explores needed federal investments in infrastructure that can provide short-term economic stimulus while also building the foundation for long-term economic growth. Go to the publications page at www.21CSF.org to read the report.

Ballou Teachers Enjoy New Lounge

21st Century School Fund recently completed work to improve the teacher's room at Ballou High School. With design help from architects at **Hickok Cole**, through the Washington Architectural Foundation, the expanded room includes a copy center and computer work stations that provide teachers with support for their class preparation. In addition the beautiful new wood floors, comfortable furniture, and kitchen appliances make it a refuge from the institutional environment in the rest of the 1960s high school. Support for construction was generously provided by the **Kimsey Foundation** and **Horning Brothers**.

Savoy Groundbreaking

On April 28, 08 Mayor Fenty visited Savoy Elementary School in Ward 8 near the Anacostia Metro station to celebrate the groundbreaking for the Savoy modernization. The project is being done in partnership with the adjacent Thurgood Marshall Academy charter high school (TMA) and the Department of Recreation. When complete, the project will include a gym facility shared between the two schools which will also serve as a neighborhood recreation center with offices and health classrooms for TMA. For more information go to: www.21csf.org/csf-home/dcps/Savoy%20Elementary%20School%20Project%20Update.pdf

Phelps High School to Re-Open for Fall

The modernized Phelps Architecture, Construction and Engineering High School is planned to open this fall on the Hill Top Campus near Spingarn, Browne and Young. Phelps will be a city-wide high school with enrollment starting for 9th grade students and adding a grade level each year. Information about the program, student applications and information for prospective teachers is available at: http://www.k12.dc.us/media/announcements/announcement_20080406.htm

Mark your Calendars for August 23rd DCPS Annual Beautification Day

8:00 am- 1:00 pm at your neighborhood public school. Volunteers are needed to beautify our schools! Help paint doors, plant flowers and pick up trash before the first day of school. Please email dcpsvolunteers@dc.gov if you or your group is interested in participating.