

Better Buildings: Better Schools, Issue 55 June/July 2010

Monthly news and commentary on public school facilities with a local and national perspective 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

Beautification Day for DCPS Public Schools

[Beautification Day](#) will be Saturday, August 21st, 2010, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. This annual event was established in 2005 as a volunteer led citywide “spruce up” of all DC public school buildings in preparation for the first day of school. Beautification efforts will include landscaping, trash pick-up, light painting, planting flowers, and other external beautification efforts. Volunteers and supplies are needed at over 100 schools. [Register today to participate](#).

An Equity Look at DC Capital Spending for DCPS Facilities

The 21st Century School Fund responded to a Washington Post article “Recent Data on Projects Indicate Fenty Doesn’t Favor Particular Wards” (June 6th, Nikita Stewart). The Post reporter took the total capital dollars (for libraries, recreation and schools) and reported that Wards 5 and 8 had the greatest share of dollars.

[On June 9th we sent a response about this article to Washington Post Op Ed](#) raising the point that a more valid way to look at funding spent on DCPS buildings was to look at what was spent on the buildings themselves. This is done by looking at dollars spent per square foot. 21CSF analysis found that Ward 2 and Ward 3 had the greatest investment in DCPS schools between 2007 and 2009. The disparity was not a little, but considerable. After 2 weeks the response was not published, so we released our comments directly to listservs and to our email newsletter community.

Reactions to our analysis were telling and interesting. Ward 2 and 3 residents seemed uncomfortable with the notion that their wealthy wards had more than their fair share. Some raised the good question of whether this might be because Ward 3, in particular, had been neglected for so many years. In fact during the period from 2000-2006, the spending on capital improvements by square footage, had been much more even among the wards, so this would not explain the pattern. Others, from Ward 2, pointed out that many - even most - of the students in Stevens-Francis, for example, do not live in Ward 2, so these investments are not just for Ward 2 students. This is certainly true, but the neighborhoods still benefit from the improvements high quality public school facilities and grounds bring to their neighborhoods.

Harry Jaffe, of the [Examiner](#) was also uncomfortable with the findings and charged that Mary Filardo had “contorted the numbers to suit her conclusion. She and her bean counters divided funding into square footage and per student ratios...” Mike Debonis, of the [Washington Post](#) responded to Jaffe in his blog saying “Jaffe, however, never quite explains why Mary Filardo’s ‘bean counting’ method is misleading.” In fact all the numbers were from OPEFM, we were careful with them, for example, the Wilson Pool in Ward 3 is NOT included in the calculations for schools. The specific projects, costs, wards, etc. are all [available on our website online](#) for others to view. We did not start with a conclusion, just a question—how have the school district’s capital funds been spent under Mayoral Control?

The school facility modernization program is such an important and costly initiative of the city—one that has been over a decade in the works—that we need to take great care with it. We need to make sure that we do not reach our debt limit BEFORE buildings and grounds comparable to the Murch playground, School Without Walls High School, Deal, and Hardy are available to all children in every ward.

D.C. Education Campus Wins Vision Award

The Committee of 100 of the Federal City presented a vision award to Mary Filardo; Executive Director of the 21st Century School Fund and Josh Kern the President and CEO of the Thurgood Marshall Academy (TMA) Public Charter HS for the planning of the Savoy Elementary and TMA Education Campus in Washington, D.C.:

[“The Savoy Elementary School and Thurgood Marshall Academy Public Charter High School Public Education Campus](#) in Anacostia successfully demonstrate planning, public-private partnerships, and multi-use of buildings for community activities on a scale not seen elsewhere in the District of Columbia’s educational systems. The project is an innovative combined campus serving a public charter high school, a District of Columbia Public School, and

Anacostia's larger community of children, youths and adults. Shared amenities of the campus include a new multipurpose/gymnasium building containing classrooms, a kitchen, children's library, and seating for 400 as well as underground parking and shared recreational areas on the grounds. The campus complex additionally incorporates two prominent street-front window cases along Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard to be used for various school and community cultural and educational displays. This is the first District of Columbia Public Schools project to have included LEED certification as an integral part of its planning and design. Overall, the project sets a new and higher standard for school modernization and planning for new schools." (Excerpt from the Committee of 100 website.)

In 2003, 21CSF began working with the Thurgood Marshall Academy Public Charter HS (TMA) to help them relocate from a church basement to their permanent address at the historic Nichols School site on the corner of MLK, Jr. Ave. and Howard Road, SE. TMA had begun work to secure the site and sought help from 21CSF in the planning and design of a new facility for their academically demanding small college preparatory high school in Ward 8. 21CSF agreed to work with TMA, but insisted that TMA work to develop the entire campus—Savoy Elementary School—a DCPS school—as well as TMA a public charter school.

TMA raised city, federal and private funds and managed the process for the planning, design and construction of Phase 1—the restoration and expansion of Old Nichols School into the fully restored and expanded Thurgood Marshall Academy PCHS. Then, in accordance with the terms of its agreement with the City for Phase 1, TMA raised the funds and managed the planning and design portion of Phase 2—the modernization of Savoy Elementary School and the construction of a shared gym and community spaces, now called the Savoy/Thurgood Marshall Sports and Learning Center. Once the planning and design were completed, DCPS and then OPEFM took responsibility for the modernization of Savoy and the construction of the new Sports and Learning Center, which were completed in 2009.

Baltimore's Call to Action

The ACLU of Maryland recently released, [Buildings for Academic Excellence: A Vision and Options to Address Deficient School Facilities in Baltimore City](#). This report urgently asks the City of Baltimore, the State of Maryland, and federal officials, and the greater Baltimore community, to act now to improve substandard physical conditions in Baltimore's school buildings. According to the report, in 2004 the State of Maryland reported that Baltimore had the greatest need for state funding to bring school facilities to minimum adequacy; Baltimore City has only received about a third of the state funding required to address this need. Other Maryland districts have received more than their state share. Based on a comprehensive assessment for Baltimore City Public Schools' facilities master plan, approximately \$2.8 billion is needed to modernize all Baltimore City school buildings. Over the past 5 years, the city and state have jointly contributed only an average of \$55.4 million per year toward the improvement of city school facilities.

"It is unacceptable - as well as unconstitutional - to deprive city students of adequate school facilities and an equal opportunity in education. The modernization of school buildings is integral to Baltimore's education reform effort. To help both students and teachers succeed, state and city leaders must make school facility improvements a higher priority." —*Buildings for Academic Excellence*.

Analysis of Arizona's 1998 School Facilities Lawsuit

[The Campaign for Educational Equity](#) released its third report in its Education, Equity, and the Law series, "[Building a Sustained School Facilities Remedy: Arizona's Innovative Blueprint for Capital Funding](#)" written by Molly Hunter from the Education Law Center. Molly analyzes the results of Arizona's 1998 school facilities lawsuit, the Students FIRST Act, on the state process for financing and constructing school facilities. The Students FIRST Act was established by Arizona's Legislature to address inequities in the state's system of financing capital improvements for public schools. This Act established Arizona's School Facilities Board. Molly explores the Board's progress in funding new school facilities and renovation, and lists funding mechanisms that still need improvements.