

Better Buildings: Better Schools

Issue 37 (June/July 2006)

Monthly news 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

Public Schools Beautification Day: August 26th

Help spruce up your neighborhood school yard for opening day! Volunteer on Saturday, August 26 anytime between 8:00am – 1:00pm. To register, please call Kris Tyler Benjamin at 202-727-0488 or email volunteer4schools@k12.dc.us.

The Board of Education Votes to Close and Consolidate 5 Schools

At a special meeting on June 28th the DC Board of Education voted to close and consolidate the following five schools:

Fletcher-Johnson EC* - Fletcher-Johnson 6th-8th grades move to Merritt EC; Fletcher-Johnson ES students move to Nalle ES. Merritt ES students move to Houston ES & Burrville ES. Square footage counted as available: 302,000 at Fletcher-Johnson and 23,000 at Merritt.

McGogney ES* - McGogney ES students move to MC Terrell ES while McGogney is modernized; MC Terrell will then be closed. Square footage counted as available: 67,700.

Shadd ES - Shadd ES students move to Drew ES. Wheatley students who were housed at Shadd for swing space co-locate at Webb while the new Wheatley ES is completed. Subsequently, the Webb students will swing into Wheatly while Webb is being modernized.* Square footage counted as available: 72,100.

RH Terrell JHS* - Terrell 9th grade moves to Dunbar; Terrell 7th & 8th grade consolidate into Walker-Jones as a new PreS-8. Square footage counted as available: 143,700.

Van Ness ES – Van Ness students move to Prospect or other Special Education placements according to their Individual Education Plans. Square footage counted as available: 49,400.

Additionally, the Board formally designated excess square footage in nine other buildings for use by charter schools, other traditional public schools or for other uses with the expectation that some of the space will be leased. 221,313 square feet of DCPS space is leased to public charter schools at Bunker Hill ES, Eliot JHS, Evans MS, Harrison ES, Montgomery ES, and Sharpe Health Annex.

The asterisked items indicate substantive changes from the original list that was made public on May 15. These consolidations and right-sizings represent a reduction in the DCPS inventory of a total of 935,500 square feet of space, just shy of the Board's target one million square feet for the '06-'07 school year.

The Superintendent's original proposals were made public on May 15th. The Board of Education held 9 community meetings and public hearings between June 5th and June 17th to gather community input and reaction. Many of these meetings were well attended by scores of parents, teachers and community members; several Board members attended almost all of the meetings as well. It was a fast-tracked and tiring schedule.

21CSF Commentary on School Closing Decisions

While three of the five decisions appear to be very reasonable, there are concerns as to whether the schools can be successfully merged, the facilities made ready and the moves accomplished before the start of school. However, the outcomes for Fletcher-Johnson and Walker-Jones appear problematic.

In the Fletcher-Johnson plan, a new small middle school will be created at Merritt, which is within 5 blocks of Ron Brown, another middle school with a small enrollment, but neither school is within walking distance for Fletcher-Johnson students, or contiguous with the Fletcher-Johnson boundaries; both Fletcher-Johnson and Merritt students will remain in open-plan space.

At Walker-Jones the question is how a middle school program for RH Terrell's 6th-8th grade population can be accommodated within Walker-Jones, where half the classrooms are open-plan in design, a gym is lacking, and there is insufficient useable space for the functions required of a PreS-8 institution.

Because of these concerns, 21CSF has offered recommendations for future consolidations that are expected in the next two years. These recommendations include:

Thoroughly Evaluate the Progress and Effect of Consolidations: Evaluate enrollment (including the possible loss of students); test scores; teacher retention and satisfaction; programs; institutional development; and whether facilities were ready.

Allow Sufficient Time to Plan Change: The next round of proposed consolidations should be made public as soon as possible in order to start the process with sufficient time to implement successful change.

Handle Consolidations on a School-by-School Basis: In this way, worthy plans can move forward immediately and more difficult consolidations will have more planning time either to work out the problems or to determine that a consolidation is not feasible.

Educational Asset Management: The proposed Office of Asset Management, working with the Chief Academic Officer, should develop future consolidation proposals as part of the Master Facilities Plan using the Master Education Plan as a template.

Request for Release of the Draft Master Facilities Plan

DCPS' Master Facilities Plan will provide the overall framework for DCPS Facilities following on the foundation of the Master Education Plan which was finalized in February (available on the DCPS web site: www.k12.dc.us). The MEP is a framework for the educational programs; the MFP is a plan for how the buildings will support those programs.

It will determine which buildings and school sites the school system will use, how those buildings will be configured as they are either modernized or re-built and it will set the priority for modernizations, determining which schools will get modernized first and which will have to wait as much as a decade. The intent is to frame a plan for completely modernizing all DCPS schools within the next decade to 15 years - - using the funding made available with the School Modernization Bill passed by the Council in March.

The Superintendent's original timetable in March called for the draft MFP to be available at the beginning of April and the final to be published mid-May. The School Modernization Bill put the deadline at June 31. However, the Board of Education released an announcement May 25th stating that the MFP would be held back until fall with submission to the Council in October.

There has not been input into the MFP on any issues except as they relate to the first round of school closings. There has been no public dialogue about school building modernization replacement, partnerships or other needed building and educational enhancements. The priorities and scope of a more than \$2 billion city investment has not been discussed. There will not be sufficient time for public response to the administrations proposal for facility improvements between the release of the draft some time in the fall and its required transmission to the Council in October.

Because it is such an important document, DCPTA, Fix-Our-Schools.Net, Proposition 100%, Sr. High Alliance of Parents, Principals and Educators, including 21st Century School Fund, asked the Board on July 5th to release the draft immediately so the necessary public review can begin. A copy of the letter can be seen on our website in the Data Shop Box: www.21csf.org.

DCPS Summer Work Schedule

The 2006 summer work schedule for public schools throughout DC has been provided to us from the Office of Facilities Management. It can be found on our website at www.21csf.org.