Better Buildings: Better Schools
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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.

DC Superintendent Announces Proposal to Close Schools

On Monday, May 15th Superintendent, Clifford Janey recommended that 6 schools be closed for the 2006-2007 school year. They are:

1. **Fletcher-Johnson** (students will be re-assigned to Nalle ES and Ron Brown MS)
2. **Merritt ES** (students will be reassigned to Burrville ES, Houston ES or Ron Brown MS)
3. **Shadd ES** (Shadd students will be re-assigned to Drew ES and Wheatley ES swing space, now at Shadd will be moved to Webb)
4. **M.C. Terrell ES** (students will be re-assigned to McGogney ES)
5. **Van Ness ES** (students will be re-assigned to the Prospect LC)
6. **Walker-Jones** (students will be re-assigned to R.H. Terrell, which will become a PK-8 school)

These recommended changes would reduce the amount of square feet in the DCPS inventory by approximately 730,000 square feet and relocate around 1,600 students. In addition, the administration identified another 277,313 that is in its inventory that is being used by public charter schools or will be made available for other uses.

The Board of Education will conduct a series of community meetings at each of the right-sized schools and vote on this recommended list on June 28th.

To view the schedule of community meetings at each proposed right-sized school go to [www.21csf.org](http://www.21csf.org).

Citizen’s Dialogue on the Facilities Master Plan

On April 24th the Facilities Master Plan was discussed by about 75 parents, teachers, principals, community leaders, and a few DCPS administrators and elected public officials. There were four break-out groups for discussion:

1. **Standardizing Grade Configurations for Middle Schools and Junior High Schools:** Moving 3,000 6th graders into middle schools starting in 2007 to be completed in 2008 and moving 1200 9th graders into high schools.

2. **Neighborhood Schools and Parental Choice:** Reviewing school boundaries and feeder patterns, considering how to ease transitions for children and families while making school choice easier and more transparent.
3 - Small School Planning: Cost effective and equitable ways to retain and support schools with small enrollments and schools with small buildings for a full educational program.

4 - Public Charter Schools and DCPS Schools: What would a compatible future for DCPS and public charter schools look like; what is the feasibility of co-locations?

Working from a vision of a family and child friendly city, the aim of the dialogue was to consider the broad changes presented by the Master Education Plan in relation to rightsizing DCPS occupied space to fit declining enrollment in the context of and modernizing all schools within the next decade.

The overarching challenges identified were how to improve DCPS schools to keep and attract families to the city and how to ensure equity with a fair distribution and priorities for modernization of buildings. Each group examined the challenges through the lens of two guiding principles:

• Do no harm to children and families in the rightsizing
• Improve the daily experience in the classroom when rightsizing and modernizing

A report from the meeting can be found at [www.21csf.org](http://www.21csf.org).

**Town Hall Meeting on School Closing and Consolidation List**

At the second meeting, on May 15th, a group of about 150 individuals, including about a dozen from the schools affected by the closing and consolidation list, discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the proposals to close 7 buildings by the opening of school on August 28th. Notes from this meeting are also available at [www.21csf.org](http://www.21csf.org). The proposed schools closings and a schedule of hearings on each school can be found at [www.k12.dc.us](http://www.k12.dc.us).

Although generally in agreement that DCPS has to right-size its facilities to fit the declining number of students, people were troubled by the lack of transparency in determining the plan, the lack of time for community input and a concern that the system does not have the capacity to institute changes successfully in the few months available. Consequently, the group voted to send a letter to the Board requesting that they reject the proposed closings until questions have been addressed and a more open dialogue has taken place. The letter can be found at [http://rightsizeright.org/](http://rightsizeright.org/).

On May 17th, The Board elected to proceed with the closing proposals but requested that the administration provide detailed plans for each consolidation at least a day before the individual school hearings.

Testimony from the 21st Century School Fund on closing criteria and on the closing and consolidation list can be found at [www.21csf.org](http://www.21csf.org).
The Citizen’s Dialogue and Town Hall Meetings were organized by a group of public school advocates. Sponsoring groups included the 21st Century School Fund, the School Modernization Campaign, Parents United, the DC PTA, DC Voice, the Youth Education Alliance, the Washington Teachers Union, and the DC League of Women Voters, and the Senior High Alliance of Parents, Principals and Educators (SHAPPE).

DCPS Delays Release of New Facilities Master Plan

DCPS is expected to release its updated Facilities Master Plan (FMP) this fall, which has been under development since early this year. The Superintendent was initially scheduled to present the new FMP to the Board of Education on Monday, May 15th, at which time it would be public, but that presentation was delayed. The goal of the FMP is to provide DCPS with a long-range master plan for the modernization, replacement, and rightsizing of its education facilities. The FMP is intended to follow and align with the DCPS Master Education Plan, released this past February, and the Superintendent’s recently-released recommendations to the Board of Education on school closings and consolidations (i.e., rightsizing).

Board of Education Passes the DCPS Facilities Management Organizational Strategy

In the School Modernization Financing Act of 2006, which was passed by the DC Council this past March and provides an additional $100 million annually in capital funding for DCPS, the school system was tasked with developing recommendations for effective management of the modernization program. Specifically, the legislative requirement instructed DCPS to develop a “comprehensive facilities management organizational strategy” covering things such as staffing structure, project definitions and schedule, accountability measures, and policy changes. Also added was a section on public communication and community involvement. The strategy has been developed by the Superintendent, with assistance from education advocates (particularly 21CSF) and the business community. The BOE passed the management strategy last Wednesday, May 24th. The administration indicated a willingness to continue to work with the business community and advocates on the development of the facility management plan.