

*Joint Public Hearing of the Committee on Finance and Revenue and the
Committee on Education, Libraries and Recreation
“School Modernization Financing Act of 2005”
July 7, 2005*

My name is Nancy Huvendick, I work with the 21st Century School Fund. Thank you for this opportunity. I’m going to talk very briefly about the need for reliable and complete information to revise and keep current the multi-year facilities plan incorporated into the Modernization Bill under consideration today. The facilities master plan has to develop from transparent decision making if it is to be embraced by District residents.

Reliable and Complete Information

The Council should assure itself that DCPS has up-to-date and accurate information on the condition of schools and on the populations they serve. It should also have accurate information on current standards within the construction industry.

For any given building, the Council should be able to ask which building systems have been replaced and when major building upgrades have occurred. For instance, in evaluating a building for either complete renovation or systemic rehabilitation, you should be assured that OFM knows that the building had its roof replaced four years ago, the boiler replaced two years ago, and new windows five years ago so that consideration can be given to capturing capital investments already made.

Up-to-date information on school age population shifts should be available to council staff for analysis. With the rapid increase in students at charter schools, this information should be reviewed annually.

The council should be assured that current construction information has been considered, including changes in the cost of materials and labor or the possibility of long-range savings through investment in innovative systems such as geo-thermal heating and cooling that save money over the life of a building.

Comprehensive Planning

The multi-year facilities plan must be thorough and complete; including broad general guidelines for what DCPS wants to see at every school and in each planning region but also getting to the specifics of where and how to best locate specialized high school programs, special education programs, consolidations, co-locations with charter schools, etc., and how secondary schools would articulate with feeder schools, public transportation, library and recreation facilities.

At the same time planning and funding has to be on-going. The tremendous amount of facilities catch-up facing the District does not mean that, once we get all of our schools up to a decent standard, we’re done. A regular, on-going schedule of school replacements and modernizations has to be a part of the capital plan for the city. At the point when all our DCPS schools have been modernized it will be time to re-visit the first

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modernizations and renovate again - - less extensively, we hope - - for the next generation. That is why a dedicated source of on-going stable funding is so important.

Transparent Decision Making

The Council through its presence and attention, should encourage the Board of Education to provide a clear process for capital decisions with open public meetings and ample opportunity for public input that is more than merely perfunctory. Decisions around capital planning for schools are vitally important to individual constituents who have children in the schools and residences in the neighborhoods; public input should be noticed, respectfully considered and weighed.

Likewise, the District government should continue to build a culture of open meetings and thereby encourage the Board of Education to invite the public to share in the oversight of the capital budget. Attention from the Council and more freely available information would encourage contractors to bid on constructions jobs with DC Public Schools and help ensure that this new generation of buildings are as sturdy and serviceable as those built fifty or 100 years ago.

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