

Testimony
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DCPS Operating Budget Hearing
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825 N. Capitol St. NE, 5th Floor

My name is Suzanne Wells, and I am co-chair of the School Libraries Project. The School Libraries Project is a unique public/private partnership between the Capitol Hill Community Foundation, the Washington Architectural Foundation, and the DC Public Schools. During the summers of 2006 and 2007, the School Libraries Project completely renovated and transformed eight elementary and middle school libraries on Capitol Hill. This was a \$2.4 million dollar project that DCPS contributed approximately \$1.3 million to, and the Capitol Hill Community Foundation spearheaded a fundraising effort that raised the remaining \$1.1 million from individuals, foundations, and businesses.

Through the School Libraries Project, each library was completely gutted, and renovated with a unique design. Each library received 4000 new books and modern technology including wireless computers. The goal of the School Libraries Project was for the libraries to become the hubs of the school where students and teachers can extend the learning that goes on in the classroom and where students develop a love of reading. This goal is being realized at many of the libraries, but we are far short of the goal at several of the schools.

There are a number of critical funding needs that the School Libraries Project believes must be addressed in the DCPS operating budget:

- First, and most importantly, is that each library must be staffed by a full-time librarian. At three of the schools where the libraries were renovated, they have only part-time librarians. It is very disheartening to see these three libraries sit dark for half of the school week. Every day that the library does not have a librarian means that the students and teachers are not able to use the libraries.

When we started the School Libraries Project, DCPS made a commitment to staff the libraries with full-time librarians. We believe DCPS should not allow the funding of librarian positions

to be discretionary, if the school system is serious about literacy and student achievement.

- Second, at central administration, there should be several positions supporting the libraries. Efficiencies can be achieved by centrally ordering materials essential to a well-functioning library such as books, periodicals, and computers.
- Third, there must be adequate funding for ongoing support of the library collections. The fact that we renovated libraries whose most recent book was 20 years old is an embarrassment to DCPS. DCPS has not had a system in place to update the collections at the school libraries. Of the libraries we renovated, the only ones that had up-to-date books collections were at schools where the PTA's had provided funding for updating the book collections.
- Finally, we encourage DCPS to continue programs with the University of Maryland and Catholic University where DCPS employees can work toward their Masters in Library Science. There currently is a severe shortage of qualified librarians in the DC area, and these programs are one way to address the staffing needs of the DCPS libraries.

One final observation we have deals with the DCPS archives at the Sumner School. At the Stuart Hobson Middle School library that was renovated by the School Libraries Project in 2006, the school has been awarded two grants totaling over \$30,000 to establish a history collection in the renovated library. This history collection is proving to be an invaluable learning tool, and all 8th grade students conduct research on the history of the school. The Sumner School has a unique collection of DCPS historical materials. We believe DCPS should continue to fund out of central administration one or more archivist positions because of the importance of maintaining this historical information, and because of the learning opportunities this historical information presents to the DCPS students.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this evening.