

Testimony  
Board of Education Hearing on the 06-11 Capital Budget  
Monday, October 25, 2004  
Nancy Huvendick, 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund

Looking broadly at planning for the 06-11 capital budget, I wanted to speak generally about several related issues around school planning that argue for the Board to focus policy on more effectively managing school real estate.

Preliminary numbers indicate that DCPS may have lost nearly 3,500 students this year, with 3,100 of these at the elementary school level. This leaves the city with an expanding inventory of underused school buildings. If one uses the DCPS space standards as a measure, DCPS is utilizing almost 6 million square feet of excess space. This is space that we cannot afford to maintain, cannot repair and cannot even mothball effectively.

In a city that has so much invested in relatively small, walk-to, neighborhood schools, the specter of another round of politically wrenching school closings and consolidations is looming, and this does not bode well for effectively educating our children.

We are also a city expecting - - hoping - - for a large influx of new residents. As such, we have a responsibility to insure that we hold on to sufficient, good space for education for the not too distant future. Our geographic area is severely circumscribed; land and buildings are not getting cheaper. We have an obligation to the future of this city to responsibly bank on the school buildings we have. This means holding on to school property that includes space for assembly rooms, playgrounds, playing fields and parking lots and retaining school property that is easily metro accessible.

Charter school enrollment continues to grow by numbers that are roughly equivalent to the DCPS population losses. In a city that is often fractionalized between charter school supporters and those who staunchly favor improved resources for our regular public schools, the transfer of more school buildings to charter schools could be polarizing. Nevertheless, even if a moratorium were to be placed on the creation of new charter schools tomorrow, their need for school buildings will probably continue as they move into more appropriate space and expand to fill their existing charters.

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Arrangements for co-locating charter schools and public schools are an obvious solution for some schools but one that has been resisted both by regular public schools and charter schools. But carefully managed school co-location is possible and co-location is possible as well with other entities, such as other city agencies, non-profit organizations, education related businesses, etc. Long term leasing of school property has already been effected in some situations.

I would urge the Board to task the administration with upgrading the DCPS realty office - - borrowing executives from development corporation and the real estate sector - - to help DCPS develop an asset management plan to manage and market our public school buildings efficiently for the public interest, both now and for the future.

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