

Mayor's Hearing on the D.C. Public Schools FY04 Budget (2/13/03)

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Good evening. I am here tonight to speak in favor of better coordination between DCPS and the Office of Planning in the modernization/replacement of the District's public schools, and to urge you to build a strong link between these schools and their neighborhoods as part of your community development policy. We believe that the schools should be centers of their communities, and that they would be excellent tools for neighborhood redevelopment.

The need for better coordination between DCPS and the Office of Planning stems from the fact that there are excessive enrollment capacities being incorporated into the initial tiers of modernized or replaced schools, and that the Strategic Neighborhood Action Plans (or SNAPs) that were released by the Office of Planning in the fall only minimally include the schools. The chart on the back of this sheet compares the new design capacities with the current enrollments for the Tiers 0-1 schools, and reveals that over 3,500 new seats are being added with no real evidence of increased population. In addition, the SNAPs only acknowledge the Transformation Schools. Residential and commercial development and school enrollments are directly linked, and it's imperative that DCPS and the Office of Planning work together.

Recognizing this often overlooked interdependence of public schools and neighborhood development, we also urge your Administration to reinforce this link in your community development policy by strongly advocating for schools as the centers of their communities. This would mean maintaining or even accelerating the pace of the modernization/replacement program, as Mary Filardo spoke about, and viewing public schools as tools for community development. Keeping the benefits to the schools themselves as the primary interest, these facilities should be explored for joint use opportunities with programs such as workforce development, healthcare, recreation, and libraries. Many of our schools should become true community centers that are more open and inviting, and that will contribute to neighborhood vitality.

In summary, we urge you to take the necessary organizational and policy steps to put the public schools at the top of your community development agenda.