

Churchill Cluster

Winston Churchill High School	Cabin John Middle School
Herbert Hoover Middle School	Bells Mill Elementary School
Beverly Farms Elementary School	Potomac Elementary School
Seven Locks Elementary School	Wayside Elementary School

Statement by Janette Gilman
MCCPTA Churchill Cluster Coordinator
Regarding the FY 2009-14 Capital Improvement Plan

Montgomery County Council
February 6, 2008

President Knapp, distinguished members of the County Council. My name is Janette Gilman; I serve as one of MCCPTA's Churchill Cluster coordinators. It is my privilege to address you this evening regarding the Superintendent's CIP budget recommendations, and to speak to the needs of our county's schools, and, in particular, those of the eight remarkable school communities that make up the Churchill Cluster.

The last time I stood before you was in May of 2006. At that time I spoke as the **Beverly Farms** PTA president regarding the options for **Seven Locks Elementary School** and for relieving overcrowding in our cluster.

I am pleased to note that owing to cooperation and collaboration between the Council, the Superintendent, the Churchill community, and the Board of Education, modernizations and additions have been made a priority at the schools of our cluster. Over the winter holiday, the students and staff of **Bells Mill Elementary** transported

their learning community—after a wonderful group hug—from Bells Mill Road to Grosvenor Lane. Nearby at **Wayside Elementary**, work on an 8-room addition has been in progress since the summer, and staff and students look forward to starting school next year in a portables-free, expanded facility.

Following these starts, our two middle schools—**Cabin John** and **Herbert Hoover**—are slated for sequenced modernizations that will enable them to meet the needs of their students, including those reassigned by boundary changes. Those modernizations in turn will coincide with long anticipated construction at **Seven Locks** and **Beverly Farms** elementaries.

Did I say boundary changes? As you may be aware, the increased capacity at **Bells Mill** and thereafter at **Seven Locks** will enable our cluster to address longstanding overcrowding issues, including those plaguing our oldest school, **Potomac Elementary**, built in 1949.

Our cluster has begun the process of community input, and is forming a Boundary Advisory Committee with representatives from the impacted communities of **Bells Mill**, **Potomac**, and **Seven Locks** elementaries as well as from both our middle schools, **Hoover** and **Cabin John**. I would be kidding you if I said that there is no anxiety associated with this effort.

For the work of our boundary advisory committee to be meaningful, ***slated modernizations and additions for***

our cluster need to be fully funded and kept in train, on track, and on time. For this we need you to approve full funding of the recommended CIP budget.

Full funding would ensure that the systematic, systemic modernization schedule in the Churchill Cluster—and throughout the county—proceeds and that adequate facilities are ready when our neighborhoods shift school destinations.

I realize that the last time I spoke before you we were not looking at deficits and shortfalls, and that it is a difficult time to ask for full funding. The Superintendent has acknowledged this via his six options to cut the CIP budget. Nonetheless, we implore you to commit to full funding even in these tight times.

- Montgomery County's jewel is its schools. It is not only important for current residents that our schools be modernized and maintained, but it is a critical driver in attracting businesses and residents to this county. I am fairly certain no one is moving here because of our roads or our traffic. If we want more revenues, we either need tax increases or additional tax payers. Within limits, I know which I'd prefer.
- We also urge you to move to increase the Spending Affordability Guidelines by 10 percent, and finance that increase with new bond issuances. Those dollars could fill the budget shortfalls we face, and provide funding for our schools.

Let me end by sharing a personal story. I was recently contacted by friends who moved to New York City several years ago. Returning to the DC area in July, they have been searching online for information on schools and let me know that they are looking at Montgomery County, particularly the **Cabin John Middle School** neighborhoods, rather than returning to northern Virginia where they previously owned two homes. My friends are no different than thousands of others. They are choosing Montgomery County based on the quality of its schools. A quality for which your support for full funding for the MCPS CIP budget is fundamental.

The children of MCPS—and the Churchill Cluster—thrive when they have the opportunity to learn in well-designed, safe, healthy facilities. Under the leadership of Dr. Joan Benz, **Winston Churchill High School**—our cluster's lone modernized facility—was named a National Blue Ribbon School this September, the first and only Montgomery County public high school to achieve this honor under the new process that uses performance on state assessments as the primary criterion for selection.

Sustaining and building on such success depends on your commitment to providing our children—and all the children of MCPS—with facilities that support educational achievement. I feel certain we can count on you to do just that. Thank you for your passion and commitment to the citizens—and particularly the children—of Montgomery County, and for the opportunity to stand before you on behalf of the Churchill community.

What have the Churchill cluster students, staff, and parents achieved this year?

- **Winston Churchill High School, under the leadership of Dr. Joan Benz**, was named a National Blue Ribbon School in September; Churchill is the first public high school in Montgomery County to garner this recognition under the new process that uses performance on state assessments as the primary criterion for selection;
- Across the four content areas that the High School Assessments test, **Churchill High** students passed Algebra at 97.6%, Biology at 96.6%, English at 96.6%, and Government at 97.7%;
- **Herbert Hoover Middle School** students achieved the highest proficiency rates in the state of Maryland across the board on the MSAs for grades 6, 7, and 8;
- Students at **Cabin John** and **Hoover** Middle schools had the top two highest successful completion rates in Algebra I in MCPS for the 2006-07 school year, and our middle school students are on track to exceed the county Algebra I targets for the current, 2007-08 school year;
- All five of our elementaries—**Bells Mill, Beverly Farms, Potomac, Seven Locks, and Wayside**—have significantly raised the number of 5th grade students taking advanced math. The elementary

schools in our cluster exceed the county target of 37.2% students completing Math A in the 07-08 school year and are several years ahead of the targeted 45% for the 2009-10 school year;

- Parents are engaged in our schools. Last year, **our PTA and PTSAs combined for the highest cluster PTA membership, almost 5,700 members, accounting for almost 11 percent of total MCCPTA members; by comparison, our children comprise roughly 5 percent of county students.** We were home to the largest high school PTSA, the largest middle school PTSA and PTA, and the largest elementary school PTA. Our smallest school, **Seven Locks Elementary**, already has a phenomenal 92 percent parent and guardian membership in its PTA this year. This is parent involvement;
- All our PTAs and PTSAs are heavily involved in community service, with many PTAs running monthly drives or programs. Several of our schools, for example, participated in the Walk for the Homeless in support of our friends and neighbors at Rockville's Stepping Stones Shelter; nearly a thousand student and staff members walked this Fall, raising well over \$10,000 for Stepping Stones;
- Our PTA leadership works actively together as a cluster, sharing best practices, successes, and challenges on a constant basis; and

- Our Cluster staff offers a cluster-wide Summer Learning Camp for students in grades K - 5, collaboratively planned, taught and facilitated by Churchill cluster staff. It is designed to prepare all students for success. Similarly, our staff partnered to present the **Churchill Cluster Parent Academy** in the Fall, an initiative that predated the new MCPS Parent Academies, and has provided our parents with information to help guide their child's education.