

**Public Hearing on FY25 Capital Budget and
FY25-30 Capital Improvements Program (CIP) – February 6, 2024
Richard Montgomery Cluster PT(S)A Testimony**

RICHARD MONTGOMERY HS * JULIUS WEST MS * BEALL ES * COLLEGE GARDENS ES
RITCHIE PARK ES * BAYARD RUSTIN ES * TWINBROOK ES

Presented by Amy Ackerberg-Hastings (RM Cluster Co-Coordinator and RM HS parent)

Good afternoon, President Friedson, members of the County Council, and staff. Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the CIP allocation for MCPS. My name is Amy Ackerberg-Hastings, and I am the parent of a Richard Montgomery HS sophomore as well as one of the MCCPTA cluster coordinators for the 7 Richard Montgomery cluster PT(S)As. Our community requests **full funding of MCPS's request for the FY25–30 CIP.**

Two major capital projects are of special interest to our cluster. First, the construction of **Crown HS** must remain on track for completion in 2027. Richard Montgomery HS is now 151 students over capacity, with enrollment projected to continue to increase into the 2030s, and it has 9 portable classrooms, several of which take up parking lot space and interfere with accessibility to the building and stadium. Quince Orchard HS is expected to be nearly 500 students over capacity before Crown is built; Gaithersburg HS is projected to exceed capacity by over 200 students by the 2030s; and Northwest HS is currently 119 students over capacity. Additional high school space is urgently needed in mid-county.

Additionally, while we acknowledge that recent dramatic increases in construction costs due to supply chain issues, inflation, and the like have put pressure on all facets of the county's capital budget, we remind the Council that MCPS has targeted Crown as a beneficiary of Built to Learn Act funds, which should cover over 47% of the school's \$194 million price tag (of which \$178 million remains to be expended). So, the county is essentially adding a high school at a major discount. It is hard to imagine MCPS finding a better deal, and it is worrisome that a construction contract has not yet been let, given that this project has already been delayed three times.

Even though it has now been discussed for at least 20 years, the second major capital project essential to the RM cluster holds a tenuous place in this CIP. Do not make it possible for MCPS to yank the planning and placeholder construction funds for **Twinbrook ES** out of the FY25 Capital Budget as a cost-cutting measure. Twinbrook is a Title I and Community School with a 72.4% FARMS rate and at least 182 students who need English Language Development (ELD) services. This 72-year-old school last had a renovation in 1986, and that work arguably made the school less usable instead of safer and more functional, even by the standards of 38 years ago. We do appreciate the investments MCPS has made in individual components of the building's physical plant, such as the HVAC system installed in 2020 and the roof replacement of 2023. Through persistent requests and repeated repairs, MCPS maintenance staff have finally sorted out chronic problems with bathroom plumbing and made safety improvements to paved areas throughout the site.

However, the remaining problems are serious and intractable. They include: a lack of fire suppression sprinklers; impeded sight lines for security down the building's oddly-connected four wings—the wings were slapped on throughout the 1950s as the then-new Twinbrook neighborhood experienced the Baby Boom—and 150 ADA violations (e.g., a chair lift that has

been inoperable for at least 15 years, doorways too narrow for accessibility, and uneven elevations both outside and inside the building).¹ Between September and November 2023, ailing 3rd-grade students on the building's lower level twice needed a wheelchair, but the school nurse was unable to get one to them.

Meanwhile, in January 2024 the research team led by Barbara Biasi of Yale University, whose results we have brought before you on previous occasions,² issued a working paper through the National Bureau of Economic Research affirming that capital investments in schools with socio-economically disadvantaged populations are correlated with increased test scores.³ In fact, according to their abstract, “Our estimates suggest that closing the spending gap between high- and low-SES districts and targeting spending towards high-impact projects may close as much as 25% of the observed achievement gap between these districts.” And, interestingly, they discovered that capital improvements to schools serving students from low-to-moderate income households actually preserve the affordability of housing in those neighborhoods! Three of the four other schools in this group of new Major Capital Projects are also located in areas of significant need: Whetstone ES (75.0% FARMS, 38.0% ELD); Eastern MS (63.3% FARMS, 26.1% ELD); and Damascus ES (41.8% FARMS, 22.4% ELD). While the demographics at Cold Spring ES indicate more advantages, according to its 2018 School Facilities Assessment, the reliability of its HVAC system needs review and its air quality is poor.⁴

We are pragmatists and realize that completion of construction is at least another decade away even if Twinbrook ES remains in the FY25–30 CIP—which means that another 800 or more students will spend half of their MCPS education in a building that does not foster improvements in academic performance. Nonetheless, there is no better time to start this long journey than the present. Please find the necessary County revenues to **fully fund MCPS's request for the FY25–30 CIP**. Thank you for your time and attention.

¹ Michael Nelson, “ADA Title II Assessment: Twinbrook Elementary School,” EMG Engineering Project Number 123821.17R000-154.303, 29 October 2019, <https://ww2.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/facilities/ada/reports/02206.pdf>.

² Amy Ackerberg-Hastings, Richard Montgomery Cluster PT(S)A Written and Verbal Testimony, Public Hearing on FY24 Capital Budget and supplemental appropriations to the FY23 Capital Budget and amendments to the FY23-28 CIP, 9 February 2023.

³ Barbara Biasi, Julien M. Lafortune, and David Schönholzer, “What Works and For Whom? Effectiveness and Efficiency of School Capital Investments Across the U.S.,” Working Paper 32040, National Bureau of Economic Research, January 2024, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w32040>.

⁴ See <https://ww2.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/facilities/kfi/reports/238.pdf>. A recent study on the need to improve air quality in public spaces is described in Hannah Fuller, “Public Health Officials Should Urgently Prioritize Reducing Exposure to Indoor Fine Particulate Matter, New Report Recommends,” National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 19 January 2024, <https://www.nationalacademies.org/news/2024/01/public-health-officials-should-urgently-prioritize-reducing-exposure-to-indoor-fine-particulate-matter-new-report-recommends>.