

Montgomery County Council Meeting

April 8, 2024

Testimony of Nicholas Bassey, Paint Branch Cluster Coordinator

Good evening. I am Nicholas Bassey, Paint Branch Cluster Coordinator for the Montgomery County Council of Parent Teacher Associations (MCCPTA). The Paint Branch Cluster is home to approximately 7,700 students across nine vibrant schools: Burtonsville, Cloverly, Fairland, Galway, Greencastle, and William Tyler Page Elementary Schools, Benjamin Banneker and Briggs Chaney Middle Schools, and Paint Branch High School. While our schools face the staffing and other challenges faced by schools across MCPS, I am here today to focus on the unique facilities challenges of Benjamin Banneker Middle School.

The Banneker community is tired. Tired of patching age-related CIP issues. Tired of apparently unrepairable leaks in the roof. Tired of quasi-functional water heaters. Tired of frequent HVAC outages. Tired of frequent plumbing issues (including flooding and sewage backups). Tired of buckling basement walls. Tired of feeling like an afterthought (or worse) in a thriving county that repeatedly chooses to invest elsewhere...

Despite this tiredness and disappointment, we still have hope. Hope because of our talented students. Hope because parts of East County that had been left to crumble are finally being seen as worth reinvestment. Hope that this group and MCPS will together demonstrate that our children are just as worthy of a functional, modern school environment as those elsewhere in our county.

While Banneker has been extremely fortunate to have highly dedicated, talented, and dynamic staff with a "can-do" attitude - and who have had to become adept at dealing with the building's many shortcomings - the building's age creates myriad safety issues. Here's an abbreviated list of just SOME of them: the cafeteria's multi-level design is a throwback to the 1970s that is too small. It is inaccessible to students and staff with mobility issues, and it repeatedly causes accidents as students and staff transition from one section of it to another. Banneker also has multiple interior classrooms with inadequate emergency exits, which poses all of the safety risks that you can imagine. Banneker's corridors - especially on the lower level - are too narrow for the almost 800 students who have to transit them at the same time. Can you imagine the problems that this creates for hormonal pre-teens and teens?

The school was built in 1974 - half a century ago - and has not been renovated or modernized since. It was approved for a feasibility study for a major capital project in the

last CIP, but we have not seen any progress toward that end. This must proceed without further delay.

Please help us to remedy these stark facilities challenges. Banneker's age creates plumbing, security, space, technology, and numerous other challenges that make teaching and learning much more difficult than necessary. Please work with us to address the challenges by prioritizing our requests and viewing them through an equity lens. Thank you in advance for your time, attention, and action for the Benjamin Banneker Middle School community without further delay.