

**Public Hearing on FY27 Capital Budget and FY27–32 Capital Improvements Program
February 10, 2026**

MCCPTA Central Area Clusters Testimony

WINSTON CHURCHILL CLUSTER • RICHARD MONTGOMERY CLUSTER * POOLESVILLE CLUSTER
ROCKVILLE CLUSTER * THOMAS S. WOOTTON CLUSTER

Presented by Amy Ackerberg-Hastings (Central Area Vice-President and RM HS parent)

Good evening, President Fani-González, 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. I am the parent of a Richard Montgomery (RM) senior, and I serve MCCPTA as the Central Area Vice-President for the Churchill, RM, Poolesville, Rockville, and Wootton clusters. I am here to name some of the **CIP projects that these communities are eager to see funded** and to request Councilmembers to **exert political pressure on MCPS's stewardship of capital assets**.

We realize the County almost certainly cannot fund every project in the unprecedented total request made in the FY27–32 CIP, so among our priorities we echo County Executive Elrich's recommendation to support the **renovation of the Spring Mill Center** into the permanent location for the Alternative Education Program and the construction of a new, **centralized warehouse**. We also agree with increasing funds to **address the HVAC and roof replacement backlogs** and with rejecting less-urgent MCPS requests, such as turf field installment and replacement—if approved, RM would receive its *fourth* turf surface/filler in the stadium since its new school was constructed in 2007. It is irresponsible to install fields that last such a short time, let alone tacitly endorse their well-documented health hazards and the nasty residues that go home to families' bathrooms and washing machines. Instead of slashing Maintenance of Plant staff from 345 to 283 FTE positions, as MCPS proposes in its FY27 Operating Budget, **the system should hire a groundskeeper and assistant groundskeeper for each cluster**. These workers could:

- maintain high-quality grass fields at all of their schools,
- lead plowing and other snow-removal efforts so school parking lots and sidewalks aren't overlooked after future storms,
- care for green roofs and other renewable construction features,
- and ensure the flourishing of flower and tree plantings that are too often uprooted from school properties because Building Services staff don't have time to care for them.

While the list of HVAC systems needing replacement, in particular, is long, we want to provide the Council with an early warning that **electrical and plumbing system failures** are going to start increasing in number and severity as those installed in dozens of schools in the 1950s and 1960s reach or exceed their expected lifespans. I wake up at night fretting that the catastrophic September 2024 fire in the fortunately-vacant former JoAnn Leleck ES building was a harbinger rather than a one-time occurrence. For example, Twinbrook ES had *two* outlet fires in the *first month* of the 2025–2026 school year. (And yet, last fall MCPS disregarded all of its own data,

including the [detailed and thoughtful work Cooper Carry did on the school's feasibility study](#),¹ dropped the school from a CIP request for placeholder construction funding to 46th in the queue for major capital projects, and began issuing implied threats to close the school for declining enrollment and presumably to bus students—most of whom come from FARMS and EML families reliant on public transportation—to underutilized buildings that are several miles away.)

Indeed, although some of our communities are grateful to see open-concept Cold Spring ES move forward in the CIP, others question why MCPS's choices for elementary school major capital projects seem to privilege low-FARMS, under-enrolled, and undersized schools that have recently received additions over Title I schools such as Whetstone ES, as well as our area's Twinbrook and Meadow Hall ESs, that have also been in poor condition for decades. At least one current Twinbrook parent is physically unable to visit their child's classroom because of that building's dozens of ADA violations and unwieldy layout.

Thus, our second theme in this testimony is a request to the county government to help us hold MCPS accountable for **making decisions that best facilitate the physical, emotional, mental, and social development of every student** in the system so that they all are genuinely well-rounded, liberally-educated citizens who are truly college- and career-ready by the end of 12th grade. While we understand that the Council can decide which projects to fund but cannot veto how MCPS uses those projects, we ask Councilmembers to use all of the tools of persuasion and pressure at their disposal to discourage MCPS from taking actions with capital assets that will lead to poor outcomes for all students.

Montgomery County students need 27 high schools; **we are opposed to permanently relocating Wootton HS to the Crown site**. The Crown, Woodward, Northwood, and Damascus major capital projects were undertaken to relieve overcrowding at the secondary level throughout the county, not to facilitate administrative reorganization or to correct previous renovation/expansion failures or to undertake social experiments. In other words, **these projects' sole purpose is to improve educational conditions for all students**. Even though enrollment is in a declining trend at present, student numbers are not dropping so precipitously as to justify never opening Crown. In fact, according to MCPS's own projections for 2040, if students were spread evenly across 27 high schools, then each school would enroll 1780 students. This is well within the Regulation FAA-RA preferred range of 1600–2400 students.² In the meantime, too many students have been unable to participate in sports and other extracurriculars at their schools because MCPS limits seats, refuses to offer freshman teams in addition to junior varsity and varsity in high-interest sports, lacks intramural sports at the high school level, and generally inflicts a culture of scarcity on children who will never again have the opportunities to try a wide variety of things that are typical in American K-12 educational systems. In the classroom, every

¹ Throughout the study, MCPS staff consistently noted that community engagement—which included families needing Spanish translation—was much higher and sessions much better attended than any of the other feasibility study community meetings conducted in 2025.

² Similarly, while we acknowledge that the ideal size for an elementary school is probably around 500–600 students and several schools in the Central Area were built to a smaller capacity several decades ago, we will strongly oppose any efforts by MCPS to consolidate elementaries in a way that makes student bodies of 800+ children the norm. Regulation FAA-RA's preferred range of 450–750 is correct and appropriate to the developmental age of elementary students.

student deserves teachers and other adults who know their names without having to look them up in MCPS records. **Smaller schools are better for all children.**

Additionally, in the perpetual effort to get MCPS to show the evidence supporting its assertions, we ask the Council to be alert for **incomplete and misleading data**. Multiple communities have found issues that were overlooked in their schools' [Facility Condition Assessments](#), and certainly reading several of the reports in a row raises a suspicion that the collection of information was rushed. Stakeholders had no opportunity to provide input or suggest corrections, even though, as I noted above, MCPS has already used the Index to delay needed renovations until decades in the future.

Over the past several years, **school capacity calculations** have also been changed, making schools appear to have dozens more empty seats than the building can safely accommodate. (Spot checks of CIPs from the past 25 years will show how school capacities that were long stable abruptly became inflated in the early 2020s.) This means that the utilization figures put forward in the boundary studies are misleading and, ultimately, meaningless. Enrollments have also been artificially lowered by moving or modifying programs; for example, Twinbrook ES's preK program was increased from a half-day class to full-day. Instead of opening a second full-day classroom—after all, the school supposedly has room for 159 additional students—MCPS eliminated one of the existing half-day classes. This removed 20 students from the school . . . *and MCPS blamed the community for the declining enrollment.* Looking at the county as a whole, I see a fantastic opportunity to expand the availability of full-day preK. Instead, MCPS is talking about closing multiple schools.

Finally, MCPS is claiming that students cannot be assigned to the new and renovated schools unless families accept the ill-conceived plan to spread **secondary programs** across six regions. Aside from the faulty logic of this argument, it has occurred to me that the only way MCPS could create the number of programs in the time frame it has announced is if it treats them as *concentrations of existing courses*, rather than free-standing, externally-recognized bodies of curricula. However, Councilmembers likely have already reviewed [January's OLO report](#) showing courses are not offered uniformly now, a situation that shows little likelihood of changing after the programs analysis. Meanwhile, the clusters in our area are disturbed by the apparent intention to dismantle longstanding homegrown programs proven to successfully serve the needs of highly-able students, but we also don't want underserved schools to be left further behind by inequities in the development of new programs. Beyond the OLO report, existing regional IB programs show no sign of achieving the completion rates and test scores of the programs at Rockville and Bethesda-Chevy Chase, let alone those common of RM's countywide IB program, while concrete steps for preparing elementary and middle school students in high-need schools to succeed in competitive programs have not been articulated.

I began this testimony with the word "stewardship." The CIP is obviously about expecting MCPS to manage its physical assets wisely and with a minimum of waste, but even before we turn to the operating budget in a couple of months, I want to affirm that the **stewardship of MCPS's human resources** matters, too. Please help us ensure that MCPS creates conditions in which every student and staff member can flourish.