

County Council Testimony, February 9, 2026, Blair Cluster Schools

Good afternoon. Therese Gibson, MCCPTA Blair Cluster Coordinator. The county's financial crisis is sobering. So are the poor conditions of some schools. Thank you to the county leaders willing to extend debt and invest in healthy facilities. It's all going to get more expensive down the line. Blair Cluster schools have some of the worst conditions in the county. Of our 11 schools, four have requested new facilities. I have included a detailed cluster report on conditions. We are hopeful that Eastern Middle School will be rebuilt, hopefully at the 1200 enrollment capacity recommended in MCPS regulations.

We have schools that never seem to make the rebuild list. Among the worst of our elementary schools are New Hampshire Estates, and Rolling Terrace. Both have unrelenting mold problems. An exterior envelop was installed at New Hampshire Estates to mitigate moisture intrusion, but did not help. The school is scheduled to receive a \$2.2 million ventilation duct system because the lower level does not have ductwork. Its HVAC system, not funded for replacement, fails regularly, in all weather conditions. Today, in this school, the upstairs is a heat sauna, while there is no heat in the lower level. It's 25 degrees outside.

The superintendent told this Title 1 community he needs more data before he can rebuild NHE. MCPS' Facility Conditions Report on New Hampshire Estates was inaccurate and failed in so many ways to document its crisis conditions. Some staff have taken long-term disability due to severe respiratory illness. Some staff refuse to work in the lower level, where the problem is most severe, because they cannot breathe there. Please keep New Hampshire Estates top-of-mind, and ask repeatedly when MCPS plans to rebuild it. It's interesting how some schools make the rebuild list without being asked to provide data.

Rolling Terrace's HVAC is failing earlier than expected. MCPS inspected and found fungus growing in the school. Again, this is another school where no HVAC replacement is proposed, but has a critical need. Heating in the cafeteria does not function properly. Cooling in the media center does not function properly. Temperature control in classrooms malfunction.

With the county's emphasis on new housing in the University Blvd. corridor, please note that Rolling Terrace is likely to remain overcrowded. The elementary school boundary study might help some, but new housing will quickly overwhelm Rolling Terrace's capacity again.

HVAC problems:

Eight Blair Cluster schools report persistent and severe HVAC malfunction. Pine Crest and Montgomery Knolls have some of the most critical needs, and HVAC replacement budgets for these schools are nowhere to be found in the superintendent's six-year CIP HVAC replacement budget.

You know what is in the superintendent's proposed budget? An indoor swimming pool and high-school size gym for a new Piney Branch Elementary School.

What are our priorities?

Blair Cluster Schools' CIP Requests

Therese Gibson, Blair Cluster Coordinator

June 27, 2025

1. Montgomery Blair High School

B. Request for Countywide Projects

5. **Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC)** Chillers serving 12 classrooms need to be replaced. The HVAC air flow in the gym is inadequate, and needs to be addressed.

7. **Planned Life-cycle Asset Replacement (PLAR)**—Eight filtered refillable water fountains are needed at Blair, including two at Blair's stadium.

10. **Roof Replacement** – Approximately 70 percent of Blair's roof has been replaced since the school was built in 1998. However, there are roof leaks in different parts of the building that need to be addressed.

2. Eastern Middle School

A. Request for Individual Projects

3. **New Schools** – Eastern Middle School appreciates MCPS completing its community feasibility study meetings this spring. The school community respectfully requests that the school be advanced to the full design process, as soon as possible, with a confirmed finish date established.

B. Request for Countywide Projects

5. **Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Replacement** – Air conditioning outages continue to affect the school and the community requests timely response to remedying this problem.

6. **Improved (Safe) Access to Schools** – *As its highest priority*, the school requests that its soccer and softball fields be secured with fencing and lockable gates. Community sports leagues make frequent use of Eastern's fields. As a result, the fields have become dirt lots. There are times when the dust is so profuse that students must be brought inside, as it poses a respiratory health risk. In addition, community members have bolted personal goal equipment to the field, which school staff were unable to remove.

Further, fencing may help prevent the type of accident that occurred previously at Eastern MS. The public often uses school parking lots to practice learning to drive. In the past, a driving learner jumped Eastern's parking lot curb, with the car traveling to the soccer field and striking a teenager watching a soccer game, who then succumbed to

her injuries. <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/no-criminal-charges-for-woman-who-struck-killed-teen-near-silver-spring-school/64153/>

7. Planned Life-cycle Asset Replacement (PLAR)—Two additional filtered refillable water fountains are requested for the school.

10. Roof Replacement – Portions of the current roof are leaking and Eastern requests attention to this.

3. Silver Spring International Middle School

A. Request for Individual Projects

Silver Spring International Middle School requests a full renovation/replacement of its facility, with the exception of the gym.

4. Montgomery Knolls Elementary School

B. Request for Countywide Projects

5. Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Replacement – The system requires evaluation for replacement. The temperature is too hot in the warm months and too cold in cold months. The air conditioning in the cafeteria continues to need repair, with parts unavailable. The temperature in the school's addition is hard to regulate.

7. Planned Life-cycle Asset Replacement (PLAR)—The school requests five filtered refillable water fountains to replace old units.

10. Roof Replacement – The roof needs to be evaluated to stop leaks. One area where the roof leaks is close to the staff lounge.

5. New Hampshire Estates Elementary School

A. Request for Individual Projects

3. New Schools – The NHE school community respectfully requests a feasibility study for a replacement school facility.

B. Request for Countywide Projects

3. Building Modifications and Program Improvements (BMPI):

- NHE ES' building holds moisture. The school district has requested two engineering evaluations/solutions for NHE ES:

a) The first engineering solution is to build an exterior envelop that will encase the basement floor's exterior wall that is allowing water/moisture intrusion into the building. Is it possible for this work to be completed before the school year begins?

b) The second engineering solution is to install a ventilation system to move air out of the basement. Is it possible to obtain the proposal on this by the beginning of the school year?

- Playground equipment is needed for pre-K/Head Start whitetop recess area. This discreet recess area is a required component for the program.

5. Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Replacement –

- Multiple problems continue to occur with the school's HVAC. The unit serving the cafeteria was fixed in March 2025, but is broken again. The school requests a new rooftop HVAC.
- Replace the air conditioning unit in room 215. This single classroom unit is not working.
- Air conditioning is needed in the school gym, as is found in other elementary schools.

7. Planned Life-cycle Asset Replacement (PLAR)—

- Multiple bulletin boards on the basement level, both in the hallway and in the classrooms, were found to have mold and were removed by MCPS. The requested replacement for these bulletin boards is a combination of classroom white boards and bulletin boards in classrooms and the hallway. The cost for replacement white boards and bulletin boards is several thousand dollars. MCPS has indicated that the school must pay for replacements from the school budget. This is not feasible for the school. The school community requests MCPS to cover the cost for the replacement equipment. This is a capital expense.
- The school requests five new cafeteria tables to replace broken ones.
- Portions of the playground fence need to be replaced/reinforced to ensure that students do not leave the playground.
- Two filtered refillable water fountains are requested to replace old drinking fountains.

9. Restroom Renovations The school requests that student bathrooms be renovated.

6. Oak View Elementary School

A. Request for Individual Projects

1. Additions – The Oak View School community requests an addition to include a) at least four classrooms, b) four small office spaces, and c) two storage/flex spaces to eliminate portable classrooms and the utilization of spaces not appropriate for classrooms and/or intervention spaces, as well as providing additional space for offices and storage.

B. Request for Countywide Projects

5. Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) – Please ensure the school's HVAC system operates consistently and effectively, relative to the following:

- Lower-level cooling: the ERU mechanism is damaged and needs to be replaced.
- 5th grade hallway: the ERU mechanism is damaged and needs to be replaced.
- Kitchen: compressor or whole unit may need to be replaced.

7. Planned Life-cycle Asset Replacement (PLAR)—

- Remove cubby areas from classrooms to create added classroom space.
- Add student lockers to hallways to free up classroom space (if fire codes permit).
- Replace chalkboards with whiteboards in older classrooms and office spaces.
- Upgrade cabinetry/storage in older classrooms and office spaces.
- Update lighting throughout the school (other than the gym) that is outdated and dull.
- Replace tile flooring throughout the APR, hallways, and classrooms of the school that is heavily worn and/or damaged.
- Improve the driveway aprons to the parking lots to eliminate damage to buses and vehicles (slope).
- Add security gates to hallway by faculty lounge (area often used for school events on playground) to maintain restroom access, but secure other parts of the school from access.
- Leak on chilled water pipes needs repair.

7. Pine Crest Elementary School

B. Request for Countywide Projects

5. Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Replacement – The system is old and needs replacement. The temperature is difficult to regulate, operating either too hot or too cold.

7. Planned Life-cycle Asset Replacement (PLAR)—

- The school requests that 30 classroom doors be refitted with automatic locks (such as found in PGCPs schools) to ensure compliance with lockdown procedures. Paraeducators and substitute teachers do not have room keys and are unable to comply with lockdown procedures.
- The school requests four filtered refillable water fountains to replace old units.

8. Piney Branch Elementary School

A. **3. New School** – The Piney Branch ES community appreciates the feasibility study process that has taken place, with additional community meetings, and the school community looks forward to advancing the project to the design phase.

B. 5. Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Replacement – The school continues to experience temperature fluctuations and requests systems be further evaluated for repair or replacement.

9. Rolling Terrace Elementary School

A. Request for Individual Projects

3. **New Schools** – The Rolling Terrace Elementary School community respectfully requests a feasibility study for a replacement school facility due to condition and capacity issues.

Condition: Mold has resurged in Rolling Terrace ES, despite the school receiving a new HVAC system less than 10 years ago, and despite service on this system taking place on a regular basis.

[https://www.boarddocs.com/mabe/mcpsmd/Board.nsf/files/9UW9UG6CD4C6/\\$file/Award%20Cont%20Rolling%20Terrace%20ES%20HVAC.pdf](https://www.boarddocs.com/mabe/mcpsmd/Board.nsf/files/9UW9UG6CD4C6/$file/Award%20Cont%20Rolling%20Terrace%20ES%20HVAC.pdf)

The HVAC does not regulate temperature correctly and condensation is present throughout the building. Rolling Terrace was evaluated this past school year for indoor air quality and visible fungal growth was observed.

Capacity Issues: The policy of MCPS is to utilize relocatable classrooms on an interim basis to accommodate student enrollment in overcrowded schools. Rolling Terrace began using relocatable classrooms in 1985, and currently has six relocatable classrooms. Since school capacity is determined based on the number of classrooms within the permanent school building, the current capacity figure in the 2026 CIP Master Plan appears incorrect. The current CIP Master Plan FY 26 notes that Rolling Terrace in SY 25, Rolling Terrace had program capacity of 678 and enrollment of 645, leaving available space for 33 students. Space in the relocatable classrooms has apparently been counted toward program capacity. With six relocatable classrooms, Rolling Terrace appears actually to be overcapacity by approximately 150 students. https://gis.mcpsmd.org/cipmasterpdfs/MP26_Chapter4DCC.pdf

In addition, a 148-unit apartment building has been approved by Montgomery Planning in the current Rolling Terrace catchment area.

<https://bethesdamagazine.com/2025/05/19/sonina-properties-university-boulevard-sketch-plan-approved/>

7. Planned Life-cycle Asset Replacement (PLAR)—

Rolling Terrace requests an additional filtered refillable water fountain to replace an old drinking fountain.

Rolling Terrace requests a previously planned small playground replacement that was never implemented.

10. Sligo Creek Elementary School

A. Request for Individual Projects

2. Major Capital Projects –

a) SCES had a complete overhaul plan in place that was dropped due to the pandemic. The school still has the space and renovation needs identified in that plan.

b) **Field** - The school's field is very small and as a result, is a dust bowl. Its location adds safety concerns, which are listed under B.6. MCPS undertook a design initiative for SCES' field and the school requests this project be revived for implementation:
<https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/facilities/construction/project/smallfields>

c) **Capacity issues** – 1) The school has critical capacity needs. Classrooms: SCES is six students away from adding another kindergarten class this fall. This additional kindergarten class will need to be placed down the hall from the other kindergarten classrooms. If this occurs, the school then needs an additional classroom space for first grade. Fifth-grade classes will be in different building locations for the coming school year as there are only four classrooms available in the space that SCES currently borrows from SSIMS.

2) **Front office** – The principal's office is very small; when parents come in, there is no privacy for office staff as parents are right on the other side of their desks.

3) **Cafeteria** - The cafeteria is too small for the school's enrollment.

3. **New School** – Sligo Creek Elementary School respectfully requests a feasibility study for a new facility.

B. Request for Countywide Projects

5. **Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Replacement** – The school's air conditioning has been broken for some time. School was canceled on the third to last day of the school year. Room temperatures were in the high 80s in the classrooms.

6. **Improved (Safe) Access to Schools** – Significant health and safety issues exist with outside space. Students must walk through a parking lot to get to the recess area. There have been close calls with students almost being struck by vehicles. If students need to go to the bathroom, they have to walk through that same parking lot and it is challenging to always have an adult available to accompany them. The "pottery shed"

near the field is used by the local community when school is in session and there is no barrier fence between the public and students. Being located contiguous with a middle school presents an additional security issue; the nearby purple line station will add another security concern for the school when it opens.

9. **Restroom Renovations** SCES has four staff bathrooms in the building for 65+ staff. SSIMS' staff also uses the SCES' staff bathroom in the 5th grade hallway. More staff restrooms are needed. Student bathrooms have some stall doors that are broken and need replacement.

11. Takoma Park Elementary School

B. Request for Countywide Projects

5. **Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Replacement** – The HVAC does not regulate temperature correctly. It is either too hot or too cold. Air conditioning does not work in the media center.

6. Improved (Safe) Access to Schools

7. **Planned Life-cycle Asset Replacement (PLAR)**— The school requests three filtered refillable water fountains to replace old units.

10. **Roof Replacement** – The atrium roof leaks and may need replacement.