

FY 2007 QUESTION NUMBER: 36

QUESTION:

Respond to the testimony of the Quince Orchard cluster regarding pedestrian safety.

BUDGET PAGE REFERENCE: N/A

ANSWER:

The responsibility for addressing and coordinating issues involving vehicle and pedestrian safety on and around school sites lies with the Department of Transportation. Staff in the department addresses these issues in several ways. Local staff members in the depots work on a daily basis with schools to define transported and non-transported areas, work with the local police officers in the school safety unit to determine where adult crossing guards are needed and where patrols are placed, work with schools and the police department to train patrols, and work on a limited basis with local government officials in other agencies to improve signs and roadway markings.

Multi-agency School Transportation Engineering and Planning (STEP) meetings are held monthly. An MCPS Department of Transportation staff member attends these meetings, as do representatives from several offices in the school system including the Division of Construction, the Division of Maintenance, and the Division of School Safety and Security. A staff member from the MCPS Department of Transportation serves as a coordinator and liaison to represent MCPS interests and the meetings are conducted by the county Department of Public Works and Transportation. Representatives from the State Highway Administration, the county Department of Public Works and Transportation, engineers and transportation experts, and other agencies and local municipalities participate as needed.

The STEP Committee addresses issues that include modifications to the roads approaching schools, while the Department of Transportation and the Division of Construction generally address modifications involving on-site needs. Coordination between these offices is critical in addressing the safety needs of schools since many projects involve several offices and agencies. On-site needs at schools are often handled within MCPS offices. Once needs at schools have been identified, projects compete for available funds. Staff in several departments weigh in on an annual basis by completing a matrix of qualifying factors to determine which projects will go to the top of the list. As funds become available, the schools with the greatest needs established by the matrix vote are moved ahead.

With specific regard to the projects at Quince Orchard High School and Thurgood Marshall Elementary School, two factors should be noted. The Darnestown Road project was managed by the State Highway Administration. MCPS does not have authority to modify the highway engineering plan, but does have an opportunity for input during STEP meetings and other meetings during planning and design phases. The project at Thurgood Marshall Elementary School will be evaluated by staff members and will be included for consideration in the matrix of projects currently under consideration.