

Board of Education Community Forum

Einstein High School

October 16, 2008

Testimony of Merry Eisner, Bells Mill Elementary School Parent

Good evening President Navarro, Dr. Weast, and members of the Board of Education. My name is Merry Eisner, and tonight I am speaking to you as a parent of twin fifth graders at Bells Mill Elementary School. I would like to begin by thanking you for this opportunity, as I think finding ways for continuous meaningful communication is one priority that will enable student achievement to continue in the tight budget times ahead.

In my six years as a Bells Mill parent, I have been a fortunate beneficiary of several MCPS programs. We've had a study circle – and as a member of Bells Mill's leadership team, I'm participating in some training on Equity and Diversity. Plus there is that stunning new building going up on our lot, and I thank Dr. Weast for listening to the needs of our community in the boundary study recommendation released yesterday.

You have asked us all to identify priorities that will improve achievement for all students. So I'm going to ask you to keep my children – and all the children in Montgomery County – safe.

By safe I mean safe on their way to school. In between the rock and the hard place that is the insane price of diesel fuel and walking distances (on roads that are often not designed for walking), is a distance that makes economic sense in tough times. But I would beg the Board of Education to think of safety first since the result of a change here could result not in children walking, but in an increase of cars on the road.

By safe I mean safe buildings. What's a safe building? It's safe structurally. Since that's a CIP issue, I'll focus on those safe building issues that are funded by our operating budget such as building maintenance, air quality maintenance, and the men and women who handle that work. At Bells Mill, Mr. Tucker, Mr. Kwak and Mr. Ky keep our building going and the kids in it safe. We need to spend money on maintaining our HVAC systems and keeping the air quality in our buildings acceptable. If we don't, we run the risk of having these systems fail us before they have given us every penny of our investment in them. Any money we spend in this area, and on our building service workers, is money well spent.

By safe I mean safe portables. With our enrollment on the rise, we're going to need to rely on learning cottages. So let's be leaders on this. Let's set some standards so that when our kids are in these, as my kids are right now, you wouldn't know it. Legislation has been passed in the state on what makes a good portable if you're purchasing a new one – perhaps we can use this as a guide for what the criteria should be for the portables we're using throughout the system.

By safe I mean safe practices throughout the day. For my boys, recess isn't recess if they can't run around. We have large fields at Grosvenor that my kids can't enjoy because we just don't have the staff to watch them. For all the elementary school boys of the future, we need to figure out a way to staff recess so that they can blow off some steam in the middle of the day.

Every day, I send my boys to you to learn as you strive to provide them with a high-quality, world class education. Once they are in your hands, I trust you to ensure their success AND keep them safe.