

**Written Testimony of
Patti Twigg, NEC Area Vice President
On Behalf of the
Northeast Consortium Clusters – Blake, Paint Branch and Springbrook

Montgomery County Board Of Education
Community Forum
October 15, 2009**

Good evening Mrs. Brandman and members of the Board of Education. Thank you for the opportunity to testify tonight. My name is Patti Twigg and I am the Area Vice President for the three clusters of the Northeast Consortium.

I am here tonight to address two issues of great importance in the NEC.

First, staffing in our schools is a major concern for our parents. And, to be clear, I am not just talking about in the classroom, but in all aspects of our schools, from our signature coordinators, to our teachers, to our administrators, to our counselors, and everywhere in between. These people are in direct contact with our children every day, and they are the front line in supporting our children. An extreme example is the situation at Galway ES. The student body there is approximately 770 students. For comparison purposes, let me quote the enrollment and counselor staffing last year at the 5 middle schools of the NEC: Briggs Chaney MS had 902 students and 4.0 counselors, while Banneker MS had 772 students, Farquhar MS had 701 students, Key MS had 769 students, and White Oak MS had 700 students, each with 3.5 counselors. Galway ES, with a student body comparable to a MS, has only **one** counselor! This large elementary school, with a 48.4% FARMS rate, desperately needs another counselor. Reaching children while they are young, and being proactive in helping them, will ameliorate problems down the road.

In keeping with your request that we relate this to the Strategic Plan, specific goals impacted are: Goal 1: Ensure Success for Every Student – Milestones 4, 5 and 6, Goal 2: Provide an Effective Instructional Program – Milestones 2, 3, 4 and 5, Goal 3: Strengthen Productive Partnerships for Education – Milestones 1, 3 and 4, Goal 4: Create a Positive Work Environment in a Self-renewing Organization – Milestones 2, 4 and 5, Goal 5: Provide High-Quality Business Services that are Essential to the Educational Success of Students – Milestones 1, 2, 3 and 4.

The second issue is school construction. The three clusters of the NEC are very pleased and grateful for the construction recently completed and currently underway. But we want to urge you to take advantage of the lower construction costs due to the recession in order to keep the modernization schedule on track. It is vital that construction on Paint Branch HS begin on schedule, and stay on

schedule, so that the high schools behind it in the queue, Gaithersburg, Wheaton and Seneca Valley, can also remain on schedule.

This is the opportune moment to press on, not only for high schools but for middle and elementary schools as well, gaining the advantage of cost savings by procuring as many bids as possible. In fact, all of the schools in the NEC that are not new face serious CIP and maintenance issues. For instance, Stonegate ES, despite housing an LFI program, has limited ADA accessibility, among other issues. They are still waiting for a FACT score.

For our schools that are in the queue, construction on Cannon Road Elementary is currently scheduled for completion in 2012. The building now in use has no sprinkler system or generator, and the window air conditioning units are extremely elderly. Farquhar MS is scheduled for completion in 2015. It suffers from a host of health and safety issues. Also on the schedule, Paint Branch would be completed in 2012. That means that the students currently in 9th grade will be the first to graduate from the new building, after having spent one year in it. Today's 6th graders will be the first class to spend all 4 years in the new building. Of course, that assumes the current schedule is maintained. As it stands now, we are allowing thousands of students to be educated in an outdated building. For schools after us on the modernization list--Gaithersburg, Wheaton, Seneca Valley--the situation is even worse. Even more classes of students will be educated in inferior buildings.

New schools are not an extravagance, but rather a necessity; and I submit, an important necessity. In fact, new schools impact all of the goals of your strategic plan, Goal 1: Ensure Success for Every Student – Milestone 5, Goal 2: Provide an Effective Instructional Program – Milestones 4, Goal 3: Strengthen Productive Partnerships for Education – Milestone 3, Goal 4: Create a Positive Work Environment in a Self-renewing Organization – Milestone 5, Goal 5: Provide High-Quality Business Services that are Essential to the Educational Success of Students – Milestones 1, 3 and 4.

Let me close with the thought that “Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap” requires properly staffed, up-to-date facilities, especially in the most highly impacted schools.

I thank for your time and attention to my comments tonight.

Patti Twigg
Area Vice President, Northeast Consortium
lptwigg@verizon.net