

Previous Testimony Delivered to the MCPS Board of Education re: OTES Overcrowding

**Capital Improvements Program (CIP) Testimony to the MCPS Board of Education
delivered by Kelly Giblin, Cluster Coordinator representing the Einstein cluster
Nov. 11, 2009**

Good Evening. My name is Kelly Giblin and I am the Cluster Coordinator representing the Einstein cluster of schools. In examining our cluster's facilities we realize what great shape our buildings are in compared with other clusters. We would like to thank the Board and Dr. Weast for the attention our schools have received over the past few years and feel grateful for the condition of our buildings.

However, you knew there had to be a "however", the cluster leadership continues to be concerned about overcrowding at Oakland Terrace and Woodlin Elementary Schools. While a long-term solution has been enacted to address the overcrowding of these schools with the scheduled opening of a new elementary school in 2012, short term solutions to the severe overcrowding are virtually non-existent to bridge the gap until this new school is opened. The problems at Oakland Terrace are particularly acute which currently has 798 students, 175 of which are kindergarteners and is projected to have 873 students next year and 912 students the following year. And looking at Schools at a Glance these outrageous numbers continue beyond the projected opening of the new elementary school. Is this an oversight, or is MCPS telling us this project will not happen on schedule? With these numbers Oakland Terrace is approaching a small high school without the structural or logistical support to handle such a population. The simple task of feeding the students and providing recess requires three hours as lunch and recess begins at 11:25 AND DOES NOT FINISH UNTIL 2:30. Providing classroom space entails 1/3 of the students to be housed in portables and the "more portables" solution is no longer available since there is no room for more portables on site. This past October the annual Halloween Parade was not held because the logistics of moving 798 children in costumes was too great. And no school-wide events can be held at the building. These are but a few examples of the obvious and simple problems. As we all know running an elementary school is a complex operation, one can only imagine the burden this overcrowding is causing on the teachers and administrators responsible for actually educating and maintaining the safety of these students.

This huge number cannot just be attributed to the economy, and people coming back to public schools. As far back as 2001, we have been presenting testimony and bringing MCPS's attention to this train wreck waiting to happen. In 2002 we prepared data for a Board of Education cluster visit when the enrollment was listed at 711 and projected to rise. It took until 2005 for the facility planning recommendation to be made. And now in 2009 we are watching the train wreck happen.

We are pleased to see the opening of an elementary school in 2012 to help the situation but urge the Board and MCPS to keep this job on schedule and investigate creative solutions to make the next two years ones where learning is helped not hindered.

**CIP Testimony to the MCPS Board of Education (excerpt)
delivered by Kelly Giblin, Cluster Coordinator representing the Einstein cluster
November 2008**

We are pleased that the CIP addresses the overcrowding at Oakland Terrace and Rockview Elementary Schools, however it is a little slow in coming. Currently Oakland Terrace is over enrolled by about 300. According to this CIP a new elementary school is slated to open in 2012. In less than four years, Oakland Terrace is projected to be 414 students over capacity. The community and MCPS have focused on the over enrollment at Oakland Terrace for many years. In fact, the cluster presented testimony on this issue as far back as 2001. Although the school had a four-room addition completed, this was short-sighted. In 2005 the cluster coordinators again requested that overcrowding at Oakland Terrace be addressed.

There are a few schools in the county with fewer students enrolled than the number that overcrowd Oakland Terrace at this time. Oakland Terrace is a unique situation in that its site constraint doesn't allow for portables to be brought in to ease overcrowding. And while the county has been caught off guard by an unexpected surge in enrollment throughout the county, this situation has been "brewing" for many years.

We urge the Board to accelerate the assessment of Oakland Terrace and request that MCPS look at alternative options that might alleviate Oakland Terrace's overcrowding sooner than the construction of a new school.

**Testimony to the MCPS Board of Education
delivered by Meghan Petrucci, OTES parent
Nov. 10, 2009**

Good morning. My name is Meghan Petrucci, and I am a proud parent of a second grader and Kindergartener at Oakland Terrace Elementary school. Under the guidance of Cheryl Pulliam, our school's academic success and sense of community have grown substantially. Unfortunately, all of our gains could disappear without your immediate help.

Last spring you received letters and testimonies from parents at Oakland Terrace detailing our concerns for the safety and security of our children due to overpopulation, but I wanted to stand before you and explain to you just how serious the problems are at our school.

We currently have 797 children occupying a school built for 450. To accommodate this growth, we have had 11 portable classrooms installed, housing the entire 2nd & 4th grades, 1/3 of our school. Adding these portables has done nothing to address the problem of too many children in one building. For example, the sharing of 4 bathrooms for almost 800 children is unacceptable. What is worse, enrollment projections call for 4 more portables to be installed next year. The last remaining space where these portables could be installed would be our one remaining play area.

Lunchtime for students at Oakland Terrace is an overly noisy, crowded, manic affair. Students only have about 15 minutes to eat their lunch, and even less if they decide to buy a hot lunch. For the 1/3 of our students who rely on this hot meal, having to devour what might be their only meal that day in 5 minutes is unacceptable. If you were forced to eat this way every day, you would see what kind of an effect it has on the rest of your day.

Oakland Terrace has zero playing fields on its property. The county parks system generously allows our school to use an adjacent field as a space to run and play. Unfortunately the kids again only have about 15 minutes to do so. What is worse, there are only 4 paraeducators available to assist with 175 Kindergarteners, and even less for 1st and 2nd grade. We parents have come together to volunteer our time at lunch and recess, and in the media center, but parents are not paid employees. I cannot assume that the current interest to help will still be there even in the next month.

Our projected enrollment for next year is 873 students, and it grows to 912 students the following year. We just cannot take on any more students, and we cannot wait until construction is completed on the new elementary school at the site of McKenney Hills. We need to know that our school has not been forgotten by the board of education, and that you will come up with a solution for us now.

**Testimony to the MCPS Board of Education
delivered by Elizabeth Saindon, OTE parent
Nov. 10, 2009**

Good morning. My name is Elizabeth Saindon and I am the parent of a first grader at Oakland Terrace Elementary School.

Last April, you heard from other parents regarding the capacity issues at Oakland Terrace. Since that time, the difficulties faced by our children trying to learn in overcrowded conditions have become even more acute. In addition, the security and safety of our children are now being compromised. While plans for the conversion of McKenney Hills into a new elementary school have finally begun, completion of that school is at least 2 ½ years away and projections for the next two school years show the problems are only going to get worse. Oakland Terrace needs help NOW. Not in two or three years.

We are the most overcrowded elementary school per building capacity in Montgomery County. We have nearly 800 students in a facility designed to hold 450. We have 11 kindergarten and 10 first grade classes. Next year, the county's own numbers show that the population at Oakland Terrace is going to grow to 873 in 2010 and 912 in 2011.

Lunch is a madhouse with students taking up every inch of space in the cafeteria. What should be a time of relaxation is instead a manic, tense environment with children trying to wolf down their meals. Many parents refuse to allow their children to buy lunch because that takes away precious time that could be spent actually eating. 33% of our students, however, do not have that choice and must spend ½ their lunch period waiting in long lines before they can actually sit down.

Recess is even worse with anywhere from 125 to 175 students on a three tiered playground being supervised by only three or four paraeducators. It is no exaggeration to say that we are thankful each day that the children have remained safe.

The urgency of our situation requires that the Board take immediate action. That is why I am asking that the Board establish a sub-committee to begin work immediately to find some relief for our school – whether it be a satellite campus, temporary boundary changes, or some other solution. Something needs to be done and the Board needs to do it.

Under Mrs. Pulliam, Oakland Terrace has thrived and become a fantastic school. It would be a shame to see its academic gains and strong sense of community evaporate because of the current conditions. We are counting on your help to make sure that this does not happen. Thank you.

**Testimony to the MCPS Board of Education
delivered by Eric Butters, OTES parent
April 28, 2009**

Good evening. My name is Eric Butters and I am a parent of a 2nd grader and kindergartener at Oakland Terrace Elementary. I also serve as a parent representative to our School Improvement Team.

Oakland Terrace is a fabulous school, but we are suffering from a severe overcrowding problem. **This year our student population of 735 students is 284 over the building's official capacity; next year, with the projected increase of over 40 new students, we will be more than 325 students over capacity.** Our overcrowded building means that at lunch, students often have less than 15 minutes to eat. At Kindergarten recess, over 150 children are supervised by only three paraeducators. And in the event of an emergency (such as a tornado warning), it is a logistical nightmare to safely evacuate 7 portable classrooms of 2nd graders to an already over-capacity school building.

You likely have already heard these facts, as they were listed in a letter I drafted on behalf of the OTES parent community, which I believe many parents may have already sent to you. Tonight I would like to submit this same letter, signed by over 170 Oakland Terrace parents. The magnitude of the parent response to this petition demonstrates how concern about overcrowding is shared across the entire parent community.

On behalf of all the parents who signed the petition, I want to summarize our main concerns and hopes:

We are concerned that our school's administrative staff is not large enough to manage our overpopulated school. Our principal, Cheryl Pulliam, has done an tremendous job maintaining safety and order. In fact, she was just awarded the Washington Post Distinguished Educational Leadership Award. However, Mrs. Pulliam is stretched thin. She must supervise over 60 teachers & staff members. **We ask that you please help Mrs. Pulliam by approving more support staff – counselors, paraeducators, assistant principals - that can enable her to continue to ensure the safety of our children.**

We are concerned that our overcrowding situation will get worse. For the year after next, we are projected to be **377 students** over capacity. **Not only are safety and security a concern, but also a possible detrimental effect on academics.** This would be a real shame given the great improvements in MSA scores recently shown by our students. The opening of McKenney Hills Elementary School would indeed be an effective long-term solution to our overcrowding problem, but it is not planned to occur until Fall 2012. **Please expedite the opening of McKenney Hills; and in the meantime, provide our school staff the resources they need to do their jobs in less-than-ideal conditions.**

Thank you kindly for listening to my testimony.

**Testimony to the MCPS Board of Education
delivered by Bebe Edmondson, OTES parent
April 28, 2009**

Good evening. My name is Bebe Edmondson and I have a 4th grade student at Oakland Terrace Elementary School and a 6th grader who graduated last spring. I have been a parent representative on the School Improvement Team at OT for the last 2 years, and I have also been a regular parent classroom volunteer for the last 7 years. I would like to share with you this evening the deep concerns I have regarding the overcrowding at OT.

I have seen the overcrowding firsthand over the years and how it impacts lunch, recess, assemblies and evening school events. My daughter will not buy a hot lunch any longer and my son did the same for his last two years at the school. There just isn't enough time to eat them. What about the children who depend on the hot lunches on a daily basis? I know that some teachers in the younger grades have to allow children to eat their snacks right after lunch because they are still hungry and haven't had enough time to eat. About ½ of the instructional day at OT is spent on serving and supervising lunch.

While the recess aides do a very admirable job supervising the many students under their care, we need **more** qualified staff outside to ensure a safe environment for our children. We also need another crossing guard at the intersection of Plyers Mill Rd. and Brunswick Ave. It has become a very dangerous intersection for children to cross.

By virtue of its increasing size, OT is losing its sense of community. Did you know that older children and younger children cannot attend assembly together because they cannot fit together in the all purpose room? Did you know that we cannot attend our school's variety show or annual "Hoops on the Terrace" community event on our own school property? There are just too many students and family members to successfully and safely use our own space.

OT has an excellent academic track record and our principal was just given a principal of the year award by the Washington Post. It is a much sought after school in our area. Please take a close look at our school's overcrowding problem so that we can maintain small class sizes, high academic excellence and still be a school with a sense of community.

I urge you create meaningful solutions to Oakland Terrace's overcrowding problem and especially consider opening McKenney Hills ES before the year 2012.

Thank you for your time.