

Budget Oversight Hearing: Transportation & the Environment

April 13, 2017

Testimony of Erika Hoppes

President of the Parent Teacher Student Organization at Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan

President@capitolhillmontessorischool.org

(202) 441-4527

I am Erika Hoppes, parent of two children at Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan (CHML), President of the Parent Teacher Student Organization (PTSO) at CHML, and a Ward 6 resident.

CHML is an elementary school and middle school located in Ward 6, and is a city wide school. We are a diverse school. We bring students from every ward of the city, uniting communities across the city into one community. Our community is 58% African American, 34% White, and 8% from other backgrounds. Almost one-third of our families are low-income families. Our school has a strong culture of grace and courtesy that roots itself in all that we do. Our school is a programmatic gem – offering a unique curriculum that anyone in the city can apply for. We offer a high-quality middle school option that is growing each year.

CHML's main building was originally constructed in 1935. Our middle school is housed in a trailer. CHML moved into its current facility in 2011. CHML has never received a modernization. Never even a Phase I modernization. Despite this and our city's strong financial resources, the city has chosen not to invest in our school.

Despite CHML's urgent need for a modernization, our community has for the past year made a concerted effort to ask for a budget that fixes all schools. CHML parents have worked hard to help improve the funding allocation for all schools, as well as the system and processes of modernization and stabilization for all schools. We will continue to do that moving forward and we ask for your advocacy and support in doing so. We can never achieve a city that has been fully modernized, with functional buildings, and a regular, achievable maintenance schedule if we continue to support and allow the inefficient systems to continue.

I want to share with you critical issues we see that are wasting city money and forcing too many schools out of the modernization and stabilization process:

- **Outrageous Cost Overruns.** We regularly see outrageous cost overruns – we hear that Duke Ellington is now in the \$210 million cost range – that ends up eating up all the money and leaving schools like ours out in the cold. No school *needs* a \$210M renovation. In addition, the facilities condition assessments performed by DGS are an inadequate method to determine modernization priorities and costs. CHML's facility condition assessment states that it costs \$500 to replace a window at our school. We were told by DGS that the facilities conditions assessment cost estimates are inaccurate and it will actually cost much more to replace one window at CHML. We have to get more efficient and aggressive about predicting budget and staying on budget to make sure we can give every school its fair due.

- **Lack of communication and partnership with schools causing inefficiencies and cost escalation.** Because of the thoughtful and hard work of Chairperson Cheh and Chairperson Grosso, CHML should get HVAC and windows this summer. However, we have had to fight to get the attention of DGS and then insist that they sit down with us regularly to ensure that the HVAC and windows promised are done and done right. This process has led to helpful learning on both sides and we think a better process overall. However, it really underscores how important communication with the school community is. As an example, we requested design drawings from DGS and discovered those drawings were based on an old floor plan of our building. If we had not been meeting with DGS regularly and asked for the drawings, they would not have known they had been using the *wrong floor plan for our building to plan out the work*. Because of our strong communication with them by our insistence, we are actually helping them address problems early *before they become drains on time and money – increasing efficiency*. This process could and should be the model for everyone. DGS does not know the buildings like the people working in and being educated in them. At every turn, DGS should think about how it can engage the school community.

- **Continued promises broken and projects pushed off.** We have seen that DGS has repeatedly failed to accomplish the promises made to us. DGS promised to address certain stabilization projects last summer but, as of today, those have not been done to date. Those items include:

 - Ensure our playground gate is designed for safety for our students
 - Sound abatement for our school after decibel testing exceeded thresholds
 - ADA accessibility evaluation
 - Safe and secure pathway from the main building to the middle school trailer
 - Pest control and exclusion work
 - Provide access to the QR reader for our water sources and lead test results
 - Plumbing profile for pipes
 - Install outdoor school signage, of which there is none for the main building or middle school trailer
 - Complete the kitchen in the trailer for the middle school
 - Provide reliable and strong internet access for all classrooms
 - Fix the uneven sidewalk and grates in the front of the school
 - Shading for our playground

These are broken promises and lost opportunities to improve the safety and health of a school because DGS did not want to meet its promises and did not communicate well.

We ask that you work to improve the processes, systems and communications. In the process of doing so, the city will save money and can include more schools in modernizations and stabilization projects.