

Testimony of Danica Petroschius
Committee on Education
Deputy Mayor of Education Oversight Hearing
February 15, 2017

I'm Danica Petroschius, parent of two at Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan (CHML) and LSAT Committee member.

CHML is a citywide DCPS school with students enrolled from every ward. In six years, the student body has more than doubled and the school has added grades 6th through 8th.

Yet we are the only Ward 6-based elementary school that has not received *any* modernization since the school's inception. We are not the only school in this situation. We've testified about our history before: we've been pushed back on the CIP a number of times and then last year were cut out of the CIP completely. After much advocacy, we finally got a first-ever DGS assessment, but our confidence in DCPS and the city continues to erode as our children are educated in a facility that inhibits rather than enhances their learning.

At the same time, DCPS has been developing new educational specifications (Ed Specs) for our schools. The Ed Specs narrative says that the "[Ed Specs] describe the *essential components* of a school facility..." The Ed Specs actually serve to further underscore how lacking the CHML building is.

We thank Chairperson Grosso and Chairperson Cheh for providing us with funding for HVAC and windows last year. Today we are here to make clear that our facility is woefully inadequate on all elements that common sense and the Ed Specs tell us including: lighting, environmental and air quality factors, acoustics, ergonomics, full technology capabilities, a fully functional cooking kitchen, as well as adequate spaces for food services, library, visual arts, performing arts, physical education, music, outdoor play, community meetings, and a technology lab. Shockingly, our school is not even remotely equipped for supporting a child, parent, relative or visitor who has a physical disability whether temporary or permanent. A student recently broke his leg and is on crutches. He is unable to easily go up and down the three floors all day – he has to go one floor up to class, then two floors down for lunch, then back up two floors to class, then up and down floors for specials, and then down one floor to leave for the day. We have no idea how many children or families have lost the opportunity to experience a public Montessori education because one of them has a physical disability.

Finally, our school is not adequate for the growth we are experiencing and continue to expect as our younger classes continue to progress through the grade levels and stay in the school through 6th, 7th and 8th grades. Our main building cannot accommodate all of the 4th, 5th and 6th grade enrollment we anticipate in the coming years and our middle school is still housed in a trailer that will soon be too small for our middle school enrollment. We are quickly moving towards a capacity crisis.

We urge you to advocate with us to ask the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor of Education (DME) to make a significant investment in the capital budget to modernize all DCPS schools. In addition, we ask schools that have not received any modernization are prioritized and that CHML is put in the CIP in FY19 so that planning can begin in FY18.

We also urge the DME to continue to work closely with the Council on your P.A.C.E. Act, which intends to bring data and transparency to the process of prioritizing modernizations. At this time, we do not have access to the timing of its implementation nor how the language of the Act will be interpreted, so we are unable to evaluate its progress. But we continue to believe that any school that has not had any modernization deserves top priority.

Our school community and its leadership is strong, working together to foster successful learning despite the building needs. We think it is well past the time for CHML and other schools that have been left behind to be modernized.