

Testimony of Robert St. Cyr
Committee on Education
Deputy Mayor of Education Oversight Hearing
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I'm Robert St. Cyr, parent of a pre-K 4 child at Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan (CHML) and chair of the environmental committee.

Numerous environmental and health-related problems will be remedied this Summer because of the thoughtful consideration and swift action of Chairpersons Cheh, Grosso, Allen and others. Last year we cited several problems in various hearings:

- The windows are painted shut there is very little fresh air in the classrooms and the smell of cleaning chemicals, deodorants and body odors permeate the air.
- The heating system is uncontrollable – temperatures frequently exceed 80F, even in winter. The window a/c units have to run in the winter in an often futile attempt to counteract the heating system
- Windows and doors have peeling paint.

After this Summer, we will have new windows and a new HVAC. Again, thank you – these are huge strides.

On our own, thanks to hard work by our parents and school administration, we also now have an environmental plan and accordingly we have begun to use environmentally friendly floor cleaners and hand soaps. This work reflects the commitment of the parents and school administration to the school. An environmental policy for all of DCPS will relieve the need for each school to undertake this effort and will help them provide a safe environment for the children and staff.

While these capital investments and parent-driven environmental improvements do not remove the need for a full modernization. There is still so much more to do than these initial band-aids. I'm going to focus on the additional environmental and space factors that would be addressed in a modernization, but continue to undermine learning in our school.

Outdoor Space

Most of our outdoor space is used for parking. Our current playground is small and is designed for pre-K to 1st grade but is also used by bigger kids as they have nowhere else to play. The kids frequently run into each other in the evenings when kids from all ages are on the playground. There are several studies ¹that show children's stress levels go up when there is not enough space on the playground for them.

We need a landscape design to plan our outdoor space to incorporate more areas for play while maintaining spaces to park, drop off, etc.

¹ American Academy of Pediatrics (2002). Caring for our Children. National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care Programs, Second Edition, American Academy of Pediatrics, Elk Grove Village, IL.

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Lack of Adequate Space

With the growth of our school we lack of space for lunch, specials, library and play. Soon we will lack the space in our classrooms and middle school to sufficiently educate our children. Over-crowding clearly inhibits learning. But it also puts stress on the environmental factors that are already troubling such as lighting, acoustics and air quality.

We are unwilling to let the band aids being put on our building be enough. Our children deserve a full modernization and we ask the DME to put us on the CIP in FY19, with a planning year in FY18.

Improved Technology Policy to Help Close the Achievement Gap and Increase Overall Scores

Finally, it has come to my attention that the city has an unworkable policy when it comes to computers and technology. Despite the fact that CHML scores are rising and we exceed the DC average on most metrics, we need to continue to improve. One of the reasons that we have identified is the lack of regular access to computers when all of the tests are dependent on online assessments.

1. There are not enough computers. There are only 32 computers in good working condition for the entire student population. Students are not able to practice typing, practice PARCC simulations and do research effectively at school. This puts our school at a significant disadvantage relative to the top schools in the country.
2. While no specific studies have been conducted to identify the reasons why our scores are low, it stands to reason that in addition to adhering to Montessori methods, personal commitment on the student's and their parent's part to PARCC play a role. One thing we do know is that in our school, which is amazingly inclusive, there exists a sizeable achievement gap. I see this as opportunity.



We understand that the city policy is that each school will have only one computer for every three children. This is an unworkable policy. We need every child to have access to a computer so that every teacher can use the computers as need to help kids learn to type, learn concepts, practice tests, in real-time, when the learning moment arrives. As it works now, when a learning moment arrives, a teacher might have to search in the building for computers, wait until another teacher is done with them – and the learning moment, the moment of interest and excitement from the child is gone. This is an important step in levelling the playing field for all students. The DME should leverage her role in overseeing DCPS and OCTO to change this policy and provide the budget needed to implement it.