

Public Comments – March 21, 2019

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Members of the School Board, Superintendent Hutchings and citizens, I have grave doubts about the plan to utilize the old Patrick Henry school building as a swing space for Douglas MacArthur Elementary school students. While I laud the attempt to be fiscally responsible and to move up the timeline for a new school, I believe that ultimately the negative impact on the Patrick Henry School community and the neighborhood outweighs the supposed benefits.

Living through constant construction is not a healthy or normal experience for anyone, let alone school children. If implemented, this plan would take at least four years to complete, during which time Patrick Henry School students and the surrounding community would continue to live through construction. Some current students at Patrick Henry will go almost their entire elementary and middle school careers without access to playing fields and open space and that is just sad. Age appropriate opportunities for recreation are vital to keeping children engaged in school and for health and happiness.

Starting in fall 2020, all 1,500 students would share Patrick Henry School grounds. This will result in extreme overcrowding of the area and it raises serious safety concerns. It decreases stability and predictability for our students and teachers, creating a more challenging learning environment for students in an already challenged demographic group. This puts at risk the fragile progress that Patrick Henry has made in moving from "failing school" to succeeding school status.

Additionally, the traffic impacts on both parents bringing their children to school and the neighborhood at large have not been adequately addressed. This year has been chaotic, unsafe and extremely stressful. We cannot continue to do this for another 4 years and with almost double the school population. The burden is extreme and the plans to address the issues are inadequate. A comprehensive traffic study and transportation plan must be completed to study the effects of this plan. Based on the plan as presented, there will not be enough parking for teachers, parents, recreation staff and community members wishing to utilize the new recreation center. ACPS officials floated the idea of shuttling teachers from a

satellite parking location and that has the potential to negatively impact teacher's day to day lives in a way that is unacceptable. There is a potential to lose highly valued educators who are frustrated by all of the instability.

I also question the \$5 million dollar price tag that ACPS has put on this project. The old school building suffers from years of neglect and has problems with mold, vermin, leaking ceilings, bathroom plumbing issues, flooding in the cafeteria, a leaking roof, and more. Parents have reported that they have noticed positive health impacts since their children have moved to the new school. We are concerned for the welfare of students at Douglas MacArthur and really question how it is possible as ACPS claims that their school is in worse shape than the old Patrick Henry. If that is the case, then waiting another year to get them out of that school is unacceptable and an alternative such as the office building conversion at Ferdinand T. Day should be considered.