

We are deeply appreciative of this opportunity to share thoughts and concerns from the community and families of Janney Elementary School with the DC Council Members through this written testimony. We hope that our information and comments will be considered in the process of completing an effective plan for improving and expanding the school buildings serving our DC Public School students and communities.

This is a critical time as the proposed Master Facilities Plan is considered by the Council Members. Thanks in larger part to your ongoing commitment to improving the DCPS system, Janney Elementary School has greatly benefitted in the last few years. The Blitz efforts have markedly improved our classrooms and common spaces, and the budget has supported critically important educational and service program improvements at our school. The commitment of over \$1 billion for facilities improvements, expansions, and additions will help address a serious backlog and take a true giant step towards providing the school facilities essential to effective learning and a brighter future for ALL DC Public School students. Your commitment – time, attention, and funding – is recognized and greatly appreciated by our school community.

As to the Master Facilities Plan as proposed, our testimony focuses on four areas. These include:

- Appreciation for the priority given to meeting DCPS’ needs for facilities upgrades and improvements;
- Recognition of the guiding education-based principles behind a strategic MFP;
- Understanding of the need to address years of deferred facilities maintenance at far too many elementary schools;
- Requesting appropriate consideration be extended to elementary school overcrowding in amending the MFP.

First, we applaud the commitment the Council and other city leaders are considering toward dedicating \$1.3 billion to projects that would “place all DC children in

dramatically improved buildings by 2014.” That is an acceleration over prior plans, and places priority on addressing chronic and critical needs across all corners of our city.

Second, we appreciate the guiding principals behind the MFP. The large and complex assignment to be tackled through the Master Facilities Plan certainly necessitates a carefully constructed set of principles and priorities to be consistently and accurately applied. As we reviewed the details of the proposed MFP, we saw evidence of the considerable work entailed in its development.

Third, we understand the prioritization of modernization of elementary school classrooms and other instructional space. Years of deferred (no) maintenance at far too many buildings have left some in shockingly poor repair. At Janney Elementary, our basic facilities are in reasonably good repair. But this is a basic problem affecting many other elementary schools, and their students and families deserve prompt action.

Fourth, we ask for due consideration to overcrowding conditions at schools that have suffered and continue to grapple with severe overcrowding and lack of sufficient and appropriate facilities. The four “Guiding Principles” developed by the DC Public School Chancellor’s office included: (1) Modernize/enhance Classrooms; (2) Ensure Building Support Programs; (3) Accommodate Emerging/Existing Feeder Patterns, Enrollment Trends and School Clusters; and (4) Leverage the School as a Community Asset.

We ask the Council’s help in ensuring an important question is addressed by those responsible for the MFP and the implementation of the construction plan. Were these principles consistently and rigorously applied, using accurate information, in the development of the list of project priorities and schedules included in the MFP?

The information and level of detail provided in the MFP make it a challenge to assess if the four principles have been followed in the cases of severely overcrowded schools. Within DCPS, overcrowding is a less common challenge than schools with facility capacities that exceed their current or projected enrollment. While overcrowding may be

less common, it is certainly injurious to the learning environment and performance of students. Yet the MFP gives limited consideration to addressing overcrowding in some elementary schools.

Janney Elementary School is a great school with a *growing* problem. Our building was constructed in 1925 with few upgrades and no additions since that date. The facility is limited, but enrollment is large and growing. Consider these facts based on DCPS data:

- With a capacity of 364 students, Janney enrollment has breached 500 and will grow to 550.
- We already have five classrooms in trailers.
- Janney Elementary has the second highest utilization rate of all elementary schools in the system at 133%. Oyster School, a new building, has the only utilization rate higher than Janney's;
- At Janney, there are 90 square feet per student – far below the 140 square foot standard. Our enrollment places us as the third worst elementary school on this standard.
- Our Multipurpose Room is too small to serve as either a cafeteria, gym, or auditorium – yet it shoulders all three duties.
- A single set of boys and girls bathrooms on the first floor of a three story building is inadequate for the nearly 500 students. It is nearly impossible to keep the bathrooms clean and supplied with towels, soap and toilet paper. With 64 adults on the Janney staff there is often a queue for the single toilet in the staff lounge. The lack of adequate bathroom facilities is a serious health and sanitation issue.
- The building is not compliant with Americans with Disability Act accessibility standards.

As the Council, Mayor, DCPS, and Office of Public Education Facilities Management continue to consider revising the MFP as proposed, we ask consideration of and response to three questions:

Have the pressures of constant, continued, and growing overcrowding been given due consideration in the MFP? As we review the MFP details, our concern centers on the delay of Janney School's expansion to 2014 -- at the end of a long line for improvements. Janney would receive "modernization" focused in improving the appearance and functionality of classroom and other instructional space in 2013. We certainly appreciate that Janney is in the MFP in 2014 for an addition to address our space crunch. But instructional quality at Janney and all of our students are affected on a daily basis by the highest utilization rates, lowest space allotment/student, and substandard facilities found across the elementary schools. Janney School's placement seems to be the result in part of inconsistent application of the four guiding principles established by the DCPS Chancellor's Office. In our parents' discussion at the public meetings on the MFP with OPEFM officials, it has become clear that overcrowding was not given due consideration in the establishment of the priorities and schedule for projects.

Will the MFP be amended to provide accurate and current information on all DCPS Schools? How will corrections be considered in revising the priorities and schedule set in the MFP? There were errors of fact in the MFP details on Janney Elementary School. These included:

- The MFP lists Janney as having a Gym, Auditorium, and Multipurpose Room. We have a single room that serves – inadequately – all three purposes. For example, our students are divided into three groups and have just 20 minutes for lunch each noon hour for sitting and eating their lunches. Indoor gym class scheduling is a challenge. And school assemblies overtax the available space on a regular basis.
- With over 500 students in a building with a capacity for only 364, we have relied for years on trailers for additional space. The School Profile in the MFP indicates we have 1 Expansion (Portable). We have three trailers and they are fully utilized as 5 classroom spaces.

- The School Profile in the MFP is inaccurate in the class configuration at Janney. We have been able to accommodate only 1 Pre-K class to date due to a lack of classrooms. The School Profile indicates 2 Pre-School, 4 Pre-Kindergarten, and 4 Kindergarten classes at Janney. Due to a lack of classroom spaces, we have 1 Pre-K and 3 Kindergarten Classrooms. Because of classroom space limits, Janney School cannot meet the DCPS and Council goal of offering Pre-K to our community. The Profile also lists 4 Art Rooms, 2 Media Centers, 1 Home Economics Room, and 1 Science Lab. We have a single Art Room made from a converted classroom space. We have a modest library which includes a computer lab. The 2 Media Centers, 1 Home Economics, and 1 Science lab listed in the School Profile do not exist at Janney.

Clearly, there are evident problems with the Janney Elementary School data used in the MFP. It may be possible that comparable errors have been made with other schools. Is there an opportunity to correct the data used in setting the MFP? And if so, how will corrections be factored in to revising the MFP's priorities and schedules?

Can OPEFM consider trading the classroom modernization scheduled for 2013 in order to expedite the expansion scheduled for 2014? Janney Elementary School has invested in maintenance and our community has put both funds and people power in to maintaining and improving the grounds and classroom conditions. Given the pressure of overcrowding, an expansion at an earlier date may be preferable over classroom modernization to be followed by expansion.

In conclusion, we strongly believe the four guiding principles must be consistently applied in setting the MFP. To date, the Plan seems not to adequately recognize the constant pressure of severe overcrowding at some elementary schools. Specifically, we see a compelling case for moving forward to an earlier date the expansion so greatly needed by Janney Elementary School. The school has been and is projected to continue

to face severe overcrowding throughout the next five years. Our existing facilities rated at a capacity of 364 students are stretched to the breaking point by our current enrollment of over 500 pupils. Long before this revised MFP was released, in May 2007, a small group of concerned parents collected over 300 signatures of Janney Parents and other community members on a petition calling for the Council and Mayor to support an addition at our school at the earliest possible date. Those 300 signers were added in only a week's effort. It is a tangible sign of the abiding community interest in and support for the actions we again request through this testimony.

On behalf of the Janney Elementary School community – the students, the PTA, and the SIT – thanks again to the Council Members for making education reform and facilities improvements among the highest priorities in our city. We hope the MFP will be revised, the Janney expansion will be scheduled earlier, and the final plan will meet with your approval and support.

Submitted on October 24, 2008 by the Janney Elementary School PTA and SIT