

**Minutes
SW Education Advisory Meeting
Capital Pre-Budget Hearing**

May 17, 2006

Powhatan Elementary School

Council Attendees:

Beverly Lindsey

Rob Lesnevich

Elizabeth Lee

Lisa Orens (chair)

Board of Education Attendees:

Joe Pallozzi

Hearing called to order at 7:10 pm by Lisa Orens

Attendance: Approx 15

Speakers: 4

Introductions made to Joe Pallozzi, County Board of Education; Yasmine Stokes, Principal

Purpose of Meeting Stated at 7:19 by Lisa Orens.

Thanks extended to Principal Stokes for hosting the meeting. Stated speaker time limit of 3 minutes; speakers to be called in order of sign in.

Speaker: Nancy Brigante, Principal, Maiden Choice School

Requested funding to bring Maiden Choice facility up to date. Some renovations completed 3 years ago. Bathrooms are currently being renovated. Facilities are inadequate for young adults. Because of \$168,000.00 shortfall in renovation funding, she will have to choose between renovating the changing facility to widening the doorways for wheelchair access. Maiden Choice School needs new windows. Health suite windows in such poor condition that during winter the students had to wear their winter coats. Maiden Choice School scored highest on the Energy Audit. Ramps are needed for wheelchair access. Ms. Brigante will email a copy of her speech to Lisa, to be forwarded to the Board of Education.

Speaker: Larrina Giller, Assistant Principal, Maiden Choice School

Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act is not enough to meet the needs of Maiden Choice School students. 80% of students have Cerebral Palsy. 60% of their students are wheelchair bound. None of the sinks are wheelchair accessible. All doorknobs and faucet handles need to be replaced with levers. Handrails are needed. Maiden Choice School needed a therapeutic pool. Warm pool is therapeutic for students with over-toned muscles as well as those with low muscle tone. Warm pool therapy is very beneficial for students with brittle bone syndrome. Students currently are transported to the Catonsville YMCA once weekly.

Speaker: Vicki Givens, Parent of Maiden Choice School student

She Wishes to thank the Board of Education for Maiden Choice School's renovations. Maiden Choice School is a level 5 Special Education School. Their students are over age 8 and 60% are physically disabled. More funds are needed for further improvements including Media Centers

and bathrooms. The parking lot needs complete resurfacing. It is very patchy which is dangerous for students in wheelchairs or those who have difficulty walking.

Speaker: Beverly Willis, parent of Catonsville elementary School student

Catonsville Elementary School parking lots, pedestrian areas and playground are unsafe (see attached photos). Curb cuts are needed for wheelchair access. She asks that the Board of Education please complete these repairs BEFORE school reopens in the fall.

Speaker: Joe Pallozzi – County Board of Education

Addressed audience County Executive Jim Smith is working to complete Middle School renovations. Air Conditioning is a concern for many parents and community members. Cost of Adding Air conditioning to all Baltimore County Public Schools would be \$2 billion. Acknowledged Maiden Choice School as unique in its scope and not fitting any conventional definition such as elementary, middle or high school.

Speaker: Yasmine Stokes, Principal, Powhatan Elementary School

Maintenance personnel are essential to successful schools and more are needed in all of BCPS schools.

Public hearing closed at 7:35 p.m. by Lisa Orens who thanked all speakers and attendees. Recap of the budget process was provided with comment that all information shared at the hearing goes to the Board of Education. While it may seem slow coming, the information does eventually make a difference. Reminded audience to please be patient; input provided does make a difference.

Business meeting call to order at 7:40 pm by Lisa Orens

1. Member discussion:

- Ms. Brigante added that 35 to 40% of Maiden Choice School students are in foster care, 60% of students qualify for title 1 funding. Mobility equipment (i.e. wheelchairs, etc) cannot fit out exit doors in case of emergency. She invited the Southwest Area Educational Advisory Council to meet at Maiden Choice School next year.
- Mr. Ed Hastry, community member, expressed concerns about drug and alcohol use and abuse, non-resident students and truancy.
- New Business:
 - Officers for next year; Rob Lesnevich expressed interest in serving as Chair next year.
 - Lansdowne Elementary School Principal is exploring an inter session program
 - Special PTA meeting at Hillcrest focused on School capacity and new developments.

Business Meeting adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Orens
Chair, SW Education Advisory Council

Speech by Nancy Briganti

Hello, my name is Nancy Briganti. I have the privilege of being the principal of Maiden Choice School. I am here with members of the Maiden Choice School Community to advocate for needed renovations to our physical plant. Maiden Choice School serves students from age 3 through 21 with significant disabilities, students who are medically fragile, multiply disabled, and have mobility needs. 95% of our students are nonverbal, approximately 60% of our students are wheelchair bound and most of our students rely on others to have their basic needs such as feeding and toileting met.

I would like to thank the BOE and Baltimore County for the systemic renovations we received approximately three years ago. Maiden Choice received new heating and air conditioning systems during this renovation.

I would like to thank these same individuals for the additional money allocated for our school this year. This money will renovate our bathrooms so that we have adequate changing facilities for students. This second round of renovations originally included widening interior and exterior doorways, mounting handrails in the hallways, and installing accessible sinks in classrooms. However, there is a total projected shortfall of \$168,400 to complete the projects associated with these renovations. We should not have to choose whether we want adequate changing facilities to preserve the dignity and worth of our students or whether we have doors wide enough to get students in and out of classrooms and the building itself.

In addition we have many needs:

- We need window replacement. Our windows are rated as one of the five worst in the county. When the wind blows, the shades in classrooms actually move. Students who are tube fed in the health suite have to wear blankets to keep warm. With the high cost of heating and air conditioning, it would seem prudent to replace the windows ASAP, especially given the projected 72% rise in energy costs this summer.
- The outside ramps from classrooms need to be widened. Our older students in chairs cannot fit down the ramps without lifting and turning of wheelchairs. In the event of an emergency, it is difficult to evacuate efficiently.
- Modifications that make the interior of our building more accessible to our students are also necessary. These include widening interior doorways so that students in wheelchairs and mobility equipment can navigate through the classroom doorways. Currently the clearance is approximately a quarter inch on both sides of the doorway. Sinks that are accessible to students with physical disabilities need to be installed in each classroom, along with door handles in the shape of levers, and hand rails in the hallways.
- These improvements are not things that are “nice to have”, but necessities for our students, for their safety, security, and well-being. It allows them the same access to their educational programs that other students enjoy. Our students deserve what all BCPS students deserve, accessible, quality education. Please consider our needs as money for capital projects is being allocated. We ask for your support as we advocate for these and other capital projects.

Speech by Yanina Giller

My name is Yanina Giller. I am the Assistant Principal at Maiden Choice School. I am here today to advocate for additional renovations to our school.

We are in the need of therapeutic pool. At the present time, our school is using local YMCA once a week. It poses a few issues. First, we have only 1 bus that County is allowing us, and second YMCA does not have appropriate changing facilities. We can't change students without changing tables. The pool is very beneficial to our students.

- It provides sensory input that most children with disabilities lack off.
- It allows student who have increased tone to extent arms and legs and be more available for learning.
- It is a great outlet for facilitation activities that helps students with low tone to be able to sit upright and maintain standing.
- It is a great alternative for adaptive PE and provides overall health benefits to many human systems (musculoskeletal, gastrointestinal, cardio-vascular, etc.). We had a student with Brittle Bone syndrome, and the only year he did not have any fractures when he participated in swimming weekly.
- It is a great outlet for facilitating communication and speech production. It is a motivating and natural environment for the students to express happiness and joy.