

## **MVCCA Resolution Urging Priority Consideration for Neighborhood Schools**

WHEREAS Fairfax County Public Schools (“FCPS”) and the Fairfax County School Board (“School Board”) are considering options to address serious overcrowding in, particularly, FCPS elementary schools in the West Potomac and Mount Vernon High School Pyramids; and

WHEREAS these feeder elementary schools are physically located in both Lee and Mount Vernon Magisterial and School Board Districts, on both sides of the major thoroughfare of Richmond Highway, and serve students who reside in both Districts; and

WHEREAS past efforts to address significant student growth, historically higher on the west (Lee) side of Richmond Highway, have been piecemeal and have involved busing large numbers of students out of their neighborhoods across Richmond Highway to east (Mount Vernon) side schools and adding trailers, modular and permanent additions to existing older schools in older neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS overcrowding problems have become critical , requiring a more comprehensive approach, and several alternatives have been advanced including building a new school on the “Pinewood Lakes” site, completely renovating the Virginia Hills Administrative Center and returning it to use as a school, “recapturing” the old Mount Vernon High School (currently ISA)and renovating it for public school use, or continuing to build-out existing schools particularly on the east side of Richmond Highway; and

WHEREAS a number of projects in various stages of development will add as many as 1000 housing units on the east (Mount Vernon) side in the next few years, adding many more students to east side schools already beyond capacity; and

WHEREAS the new elementary school on Fort Belvoir will allow 300 or more students to return to their base neighborhood and free up space at Woodlawn ES which could allow more students who live close by to attend a neighborhood school instead of being bused long distances; and

WHEREAS the concept of the neighborhood school has been a cornerstone of public education for many reasons including:

- I. Providing a focal point for community support and participation in schools,
- II. Providing easy access for children, who may be able to walk or bike to school and afterschool activities and use recreational space on weekends,
- III. Providing easy access for parents and better opportunity to interact with staff and other parents and to participate in school activities,
- IV. Providing citizens with meeting and recreational space, a sense of ownership and pride in the local school; and

WHEREAS students on the west side of Richmond Highway, who are bused for capacity reasons across Richmond Highway, and their communities have been deprived of the benefits of a neighborhood school for many years and, because such students are disproportionately economically disadvantaged and/or non-English speaking, this disconnection from neighborhood may be particularly damaging to educational, community and social progress; and

WHEREAS construction of the long-discussed elementary school on the “Pinewood Lakes” site would enable many more students to attend a close-by school and give communities much needed recreation space as well as increase community involvement and interest; and

WHEREAS renovation of Virginia Hills might accomplish some purposes at some construction cost savings, but would require costly relocation of offices and programs mostly likely to a location farther away from students served, and its location is less than optimal for sensible boundary changes; and

WHEREAS the ISA building is owned by the County but the potential cost of renovation is not known, its location would provide no benefit in terms of neighborhood schools and could be dangerous; a better use would be for post-high school education, or County programs; and

WHEREAS a comprehensive boundary adjustment with respect to schools on the west side of Richmond Highway in light of the new school and the Fort Belvoir school construction, would enable many more students to benefit from neighborhood schools and result in many students coming “home” from east side schools alleviating overcrowding and bus problems in east side schools; and

WHEREAS continuing to enlarge existing schools creates a myriad of problems including:

- I. Loss of neighborhood connection both for students bused in and for the surrounding area,
- II. Continued long bus rides for children and safety concerns about large numbers of buses traversing community roads not designed for those vehicles to schools not designed to accommodate many buses and cars,
- III. Reducing open space around schools for recess and community use while increasing impervious surface and drainage issues,
- IV. Straining “core” facilities in that cafeterias, libraries and special purpose rooms are often not enlarged to accommodate more students,
- V. Impeding efforts by staff to personally connect with students and families particularly when many students reside miles from the school; and

WHEREAS it must be recognized that restoring neighborhood schools may result in increasing the percentage of disadvantaged or limited-English students in some schools but, assuming adequate resources are made available to those schools, this problem is outweighed by increasing the ability of children, parents, and community residents to feel connected to the school and invested in their community and the well-being of students , and making it easier to connect County services with needy families;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Associations urges FCPS and the School Board to make neighborhood schools a top priority in addressing elementary school overcrowding in the West Potomac and Mount Vernon Pyramids and specifically that:

- (1) A new elementary school be constructed, preferably on the Pinewood Lakes site, and
- (2) Comprehensive “west side” boundary studies should cover all schools with a primary goal of returning as many “west side” students as possible to “west side” neighborhood schools and to schools closer to their residences, and
- (3) Comprehensive “east side” boundary studies should include the potential impact of the new school, the Fort Belvoir school and proposed “east side” development in determining the need for expansion of “east side” schools or reassignment of programs;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Associations takes no position at this time as to any specific boundary studies or boundary or program realignment with respect to any school and reserves its rights to comment on any proposals in this ongoing process.