

Testimony of Theresa Dike, Parent at Ashburton, for February 6, 2025, CIP Hearing

Good evening, Council President Kate Stewart and esteemed council members. My name is Theresa Dike; I am a parent of a 4th grader at Ashburton Elementary.

With close to 900 students, Ashburton is at overcapacity, with this number projected to increase due to the additional population resulting from the construction of high population properties such as Amalyn, Astrid, and the Rae housing developments within the school's catchment area.

This overcapacity has been a long-standing problem, which poses among other things, a safety and security concern for the school and our students. I, therefore, urge the council and MCPS to work together to craft a solution addressing the overcapacity and unchecked enrollment growth at the school.

According to a Montgomery County Planning Department document,¹ the current modular classroom wing at Ashburton built in 2019 was solely intended to create an overall school capacity of 770 seats, which MCPD described as "the approximate upper limit of the preferred school capacity." This MCPD document described the modular classroom wing as only intended to "accommodate the additional students until a new elementary school can be constructed in the cluster", which would "not commit MCPS to an exceptionally large elementary school."

MCPS Superintendent Taylor recognized in a letter to Bethesda Elementary School families in December 2024, that a modular classroom "is not optimal for the long run because the temporary structures of modular classrooms are not designed for long-term use." He further notes, "when modular classrooms are added, the size of common areas does not change, resulting in the school still feeling overcrowded with limited operations." And yet, the modular

¹ Ashburton Elementary School Addition, Mandatory Referral, MR20158009

classroom wing at Ashburton remains in use 7 – let me repeat- 7 years later, with no plans articulated to address Ashburton’s overcapacity problem.

The high number of students in Ashburton’s classrooms and lunch/recess areas due to overcapacity poses unsustainable dangerous situations. As an example, should an emergency occur, the large population will make it difficult to safely and quickly evacuate them. Some students are prevented from finishing their lunch because lunch periods at Ashburton stretch from 10:20 in the morning until 2:20 in the afternoon to accommodate one lunch period per grade – yes, you heard me correctly, we have six lunch periods because each grade is so large. As another example, the large numbers result in inadequate monitoring of students at lunch, recess time and dismissals, which also poses a dangerous situation. In addition, the stress created for teachers results in teacher burn-out and a high level of attrition.

Also, objective data, including from the state of Maryland and MCPS, which I have cited in my written testimony², shows that Ashburton is significantly behind neighboring schools academically on state-required tests, and has a much higher utilization percentage than neighboring schools, thus the overcapacity at Ashburton also negatively impacts the academic growth of the school.

This situation has become untenable. I thus, again implore the council and MCPS to work together to address the overcapacity issue as an urgent and immediate priority.

Thank you for your gracious willingness to listen.

Theresa Dike

Parent at Ashburton Elementary School

² See, e.g. <https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov/>;
<https://gis.mcpsmd.org/Dashboard/Dashboard2.html>.