



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
JOHN A. WILSON BUILDING
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, NW
WASHINGTON, DC 20004

JANESE LEWIS GEORGE
Councilmember, Ward 4

COMMITTEE MEMBER
Human Services
Labor and Workforce Development
Recreation, Libraries and Youth Affairs
Transportation and the Environment
Special Committee, COVID-19 Recovery

November 18, 2022

Lewis Ferebee
Chancellor
District of Columbia Public Schools
1200 First Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002

Keith Anderson
Director, Department of General Services
2000 14th Street, NW 8th Floor
Washington, DC 20009

Dear Chancellor Ferebee and Director Anderson:

I am writing to request your further support in maintaining Whittier Elementary School as a safe and productive learning environment for all students. Last month, a radiator exploded at Whittier. Luckily no one was injured, but students and staff had to be evacuated across the street to Ida B. Wells Middle School while the broken radiator was taken offline. I remain deeply concerned that we are not adequately investing in preventive maintenance at Whittier as they await their full modernization to start in 2025.

The Whittier PTA recently organized a rally and letter-writing campaign requesting that their modernization be moved up to next year, 2023, because of recent events and other chronic building issues. In response, Chancellor Ferebee, you said “we are not able to shift the modernization schedule.” This is disappointing and I ask that you reconsider. It’s my understanding that Whittier’s current ranking (#9) in the PACE Act school modernization system is based on calculations and *data from five years ago*: schoolyear 2017-2018. Since then, Whittier has experienced significant enrollment growth and precipitously declining facility conditions. **Please re-run the PACE Act calculations with data from this schoolyear.** I understand that the PACE Act limits your flexibility in changing the modernization schedule, but we should ensure calculations are based on the best and most recent data available.

Last year we successfully moved Whittier’s modernization up a year. We also secured funding for Whittier’s elevator to improve A.D.A. accessibility, although half of the building remains accessible only by stairs. Earlier this year we also ensured that all Ward 4 schools coming up for modernization (Truesdell, Whittier, and LaSalle-Backus) could use the former Sharpe Health building in Ward 4 as swing space. These were important steps, but they do not address the urgent and ongoing maintenance issues at Whittier.

I'd like your commitment to fully invest in and implement proactive and preventive maintenance at Whittier. Without proactive and preventative maintenance, Whittier's students, teachers, and staff will continue to be displaced by facility breakdowns, which have become a regular occurrence in recent years. And without proactive and preventative maintenance, Whittier will continue to endure daily indignities that have no place in our schools, such as leaks, water damage, strong odors, and inaccessibility. The following persistent maintenance issues have prevented Whittier from achieving a safe and productive learning environment:

- Replace the broken radiator in the breezeway
- Perform water treatment to prevent corrosion within the boiler systems
- Seal the annex rooftop door, which leaks when it rains
- Fix the sump pump plumbing system affecting ECE classrooms (002, 003, and 004), which currently emits a strong odor and clogs on a regular basis
- Replace the broken or hanging bricks on the annex exterior walls
- Overhaul the old wing HVAC system, which breaks frequently, requiring Whittier to maintain back-up window units and spot coolers in most classrooms
- Fix the drainage over the gymnasium roof, which currently collects rainwater
- Fix the old wing roof leak, not the ceiling or wall paint and plaster, but the roof itself
- Install turf for the new blacktop soccer pitch

Please share an update on each of the bulleted requests above by Friday, December 2nd. I'd also like to schedule regular check-in meetings with your teams on how we can better ensure that Whittier remains in a state of good repair.

I'm also re-attaching the letter I sent in August after this year's school readiness tours in Ward 4. Unfortunately, many of the issues remain broken or in need of repair today – three months later. This is an issue at Whittier and at other Ward 4 schools. I remain deeply frustrated by the lack of progress towards achieving basic building maintenance. As we enter the winter cold season, we cannot wait for another emergency to begin work to make these fixes. I need your partnership and coordination on these efforts, especially at Whittier, but also throughout Ward 4.

Thank you and I appreciate your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,



Janeese Lewis George
Councilmember, Ward 4

Cc: Phil Mendelson, Chairman, Council and Council Committee of the Whole
Robert White, Chairman, Council Committee on Government Operations and Facilities