

## Montgomery County school board votes to build middle school

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The Montgomery County Board of Education voted Thursday to go forward with plans for a new middle school in the Chevy Chase area to help relieve overcrowding. The board also said it would study how to improve services at the area's overcrowded elementary schools, where parents have complained about reduced services.

The sixth grades at Chevy Chase and North Chevy Chase elementary schools were hit with cuts this year that made them less comparable to the sixth grades at nearby middle schools, and the issue [has thus far dominated public debate](#) over the budget. But a school board member said Thursday that improvements probably would have to be made in ways that do not involve spending more money.

"It would be robbing Peter to pay Paul," said Board of Education President Patricia O'Neill (Bethesda-Chevy Chase). "We're facing significant budget challenges, and so there's not a lot of resources."

O'Neill raised the possibility of sharing more teachers between schools and altering the structure of the school day. But she said she did not think that temporarily moving the sixth-grade students to Westland Middle School would be a good solution.

"It would have a negative impact," packing more than 1,500 students into a school built for 1,060, she said.

The plan approved Thursday will move the sixth-graders at the two elementary schools to middle school, as they are throughout the rest of the county, when the new school is built. But [it will be several years](#) before the school is ready, and the plan depends on obtaining County Council approval for construction funding, which Superintendent Jerry D. Weast said is not guaranteed.

"I don't know whether we'll get the capital money necessary to do this middle school," he said. "Or when we'll get it."

The plan also moves up to spring 2011 a study of the attendance boundaries of Bethesda, Chevy Chase and North Chevy Chase elementary schools and Rosemary Hills Primary School.

At 144,000 students, Montgomery's is the largest school system in Maryland and the 16th largest in the country. Class rolls grew by more than 2,000 this year, and the school system anticipates adding 10,000 more by 2015.