

Maryland Historical Trust Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. PG: 72-064

1. Name of Property (indicate preferred name)

historic Fairmont Heights High School
other _____

2. Location

street and number 1401 Nye Street _____ not for publication
city, town Capitol Heights _____ vicinity
county Prince George's

3. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Board of Education
street and number 14201 School Lane _____ telephone _____
city, town Upper Marlboro state MD zip code 20772

4. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Prince George's County Courthouse liber 970 folio 265
city, town Upper Marlboro tax map 58 tax parcel 4 tax ID number 18 1992221

5. Primary Location of Additional Data

_____ Contributing Resource in National Register District
_____ Contributing Resource in Local Historic District
_____ Determined Eligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
_____ Determined Ineligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
_____ Recorded by HABS/HAER
_____ Historic Structure Report or Research Report at MHT
_____ Other: _____

6. Classification

Category	Ownership	Current Function	Resource Count	
_____ district	<u>X</u> public	_____ agriculture	Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>X</u> building(s)	_____ private	_____ landscape	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u> buildings
_____ structure	_____ both	_____ commerce/trade	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u> sites
_____ site		_____ defense	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u> structures
_____ object		_____ domestic	<u>0</u>	<u>3</u> objects
		<u>X</u> education	<u>2</u>	<u>8</u> Total
		_____ funerary		
		_____ government		
		_____ health care		
		_____ industry		
		_____ unknown		
		_____ vacant/not in use		
		_____ other:		
			Number of Contributing Resources previously listed in the Inventory	
			<u>0</u>	

7. Description

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Condition

excellent deteriorated
 good ruins
 fair altered

Prepare both a one paragraph summary and a comprehensive description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Fairmont Heights High School is located at 1401 Nye Street in Capitol Heights, Maryland. The 14.90-acre campus is bound by Nye Street to the south and North Englewood Drive to the west. Single-family dwellings are located to the east and north. Concrete sidewalks, flanked by immature trees and shrubs, extend along Nye Street and North Englewood Drive. The campus is partially enclosed by a tall chain-link fence and features concrete walkways throughout. The main parking lot is located along Nye Street with secondary parking to the north and southeast of the building. A circular drive, located in front of the main entry, is complimented by a small landscaped courtyard and flagpole. At the north end of the campus is a softball field. East of the school building are a track and football field. In the southeast corner of the property are tennis courts. The property is set on a steep bluff that drops dramatically to the north and northeast towards the athletic field. Mature trees line the eastern and northern boundaries of the campus.

FAIRMONT HEIGHTS HIGH SCHOOL

EXTERIOR

Fairmont Heights High School is a 174,128 square-foot building constructed of concrete-block with a stretcher-bond brick veneer. Set on a solid foundation, this school has an irregular form loosely based on an H-shaped plan with large appendages on the southeast and northwest corners. Viewed from Nye Street, the high school appears to be only one-story. However, due to the extreme slope of the site, the building actually has five levels. All of the roofs are flat and have brick parapet walls with molded metal coping. Metal gutters extend from the parapet wall down the sides of the elevations. Much of the building also features a wide fascia composed of concrete panels over a stretcher-bond brick string.

The main entry is located in a canted corner in the northeast corner of the courtyard. The main entry, accessed via a concrete walkway, includes two, double-leaf metal doors with lights set in a wide surround of one-light, metal-sash fixed windows. A concrete band, similar to that found along the roofline and above the window openings, extends across the main entry.

Window openings on the school includes a collection of predominately casement and awning windows, with a small number of double-hung windows. All of the windows have metal sash. A majority of window openings are complimented by concrete lug sills and large concrete spandrels above. Some of the window openings were infilled with brick following the 1983 renovation of the school.

The east elevation of the school features bands of two-light, metal-sash awning and casement windows. The openings feature concrete lug sills and are surmounted by large, concrete spandrels. In the middle of the elevation is a one-story, one-bay brick porch. The porch is supported by brick posts. Above the porch is a brick half-wall with a metal-frame greenhouse roof attached.

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The southeast block of the school serves as the gymnasium. Due to the extreme slope of the site, the south elevation reads as only one story. However, this block is three stories when viewed from the east and north. The lower level of this block is parged while the remaining exterior is faced in stretcher-bond brick. The south elevation features a brick parapet wall. The lower level of this block is pierced by three-light metal awning windows with concrete sills. Single-leaf metal doors are found at the lower level of the east elevation. The upper stories contain bands of metal-sash awning windows with concrete pilasters.

Attached to the northeast corner of the school is a one-story block which, based on its form and materials, appears to be an original component of the building.

The western portion of the building is composed of a series of one-story projections. Based on the form and materials of these blocks, it appears that they contain the mechanical systems for the school. A large air-conditioning unit is located on the roof. Fenestration consists of single and paired metal casement and awning windows. The openings have concrete lug sills and concrete spandrels above.

Following a destructive fire in the interior of the school, the building was renovated beginning in the fall of 1983 at a cost of \$8.4 million.¹ In addition to affecting much of the school, the fire completely destroyed the library. The library was originally located across from the gymnasium in the southern end of the school. The renovation project resulted in the reallocation of interior space with the new library opening on a lower level. The original library space was rebuilt to serve as the school's clinic and additional classroom space.

A large addition was constructed on the northern end of the school as part of the fire renovation. Originally intended to be larger than its current size, the addition features a thin, three-story block which extends east-to-west and connects to the north elevation of the school. This three-story block forms an interior courtyard on the northern end of school. Instead of being a large, three-story addition, the northern end of the addition was only one-story and supported by concrete columns. This unusual circumstance permits vehicular access below the structure and provides for pedestrian access to the interior courtyard. Constructed of concrete block, the addition is faced with stretcher-bond brick. Prominent concrete belt courses extend along the base of the structure as well as forming a wide cornice. Set between these bands are vertical openings that hold single-light, fixed metal windows over one-light metal casements. The vertical emphasis of the window openings are in contrast to the horizontal concrete belt courses. Furthermore, the thin window openings maintain the verticality offset by the columns supporting the structure. The addition, constructed of concrete block faced with stretcher-bond brick, has a shallow, sloped roof (not visible from the public right-of-way). The west elevation has a concrete staircase with a metal railing that provides access to an integral porch in the northwest corner of the addition. The porch shelters a single-leaf metal door.

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Also c. 1983, a small, one-story addition was constructed on the west elevation of the school. This date is substantiated by the use of similar brick and the application of concrete panels to form a wide cornice as found on the large, elevated addition on the north elevation. This small addition features a double-leaf metal door accessed via concrete steps on the west elevation and three, single-light windows with blank spandrels above and below set within thin, recessed openings.

In 1988 the boiler was overhauled, followed in 2004 by the rehabilitation of the elevator system.²

INTERIOR

Fairmont Heights High School has five levels with similar floor plans. The main entry opens to a lobby which features plaques and two display cases on the far wall. Administrative offices are located off the main lobby. The interior of the school is centered on a long hallway running north-south which is bisected by another hallway extending east-west. At the convergence of these two principal hallways is a canted corner with a large support member. A majority of the hallways have metal lockers installed in an alternating brown-orange pattern. Tile floors, tiled walls, and drop-ceilings with large fluorescent lighting fixtures complete the hallways. Integrated display cases are dispersed throughout the school. Door openings hold single-leaf wood doors with a single light and transom covered with similar wood paneling. The openings have plain metal surrounds.

Multiple stairwells and an elevator provide access to the different levels.

Classrooms also have tiled floors and drop ceilings. Electrical masts descend from the ceiling to provide electrical conduits where required. Blackboards and erasable boards are placed on walls. Additionally, television monitors have been placed in some classrooms. Window openings in the classrooms are typically paired and have metal blinds.

The gymnasium, located in the southeast corner of the building, features hardwood flooring, tiled walls, and a drop ceiling with lighting. The north and south interior walls have banks of retractable wood bleachers and ribbons of metal-sash awning windows. Basketball hoops are attached to the ceiling of the gym and extend downward when needed. Scoreboards are attached to the east and west interior walls.

FLAGPOLE

A metal flagpole is located within the main parking area in a small grassy area. The pole is accessed via a concrete walkway.

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BRICK SIGN

A brick sign is located west of the main entrance to the school. Dedicated by the class of 1986, this sign is composed of a granite tablet supported by brick posts. The sign is approximately five feet tall and seven feet wide. The granite tablet is inscribed in red letters: FAIRMONT HEIGHTS / HIGH SCHOOL / HOME OF THE / HORNETS / CLASS OF 1986. An image of a red and grey hornet complements the inscription.

METAL SIGN

Located along Nye Road in front of the school, a metal sign offers monthly updates about the school. Based on its form and materials, it appears that this sign was constructed c. 2005. The large metal sign has a boxed support set on a poured concrete foundation. The metal sign has written on it: FAIRMONT HEIGHTS / HIGH SCHOOL. An image of a yellow and black hornet completes the sign.

NEW TICKET BOOTH

A ticket booth, based on its form and materials, appears to have been constructed c. 1995. A small wooden sign affixed to the fascia board reads, "Class of '97". Set on a solid asphalt foundation, this wood-frame structure is clad in plywood and capped by a side-gabled roof of asphalt shingles. Thin corner boards adorn the building. The façade (southeast elevation) has two large openings. The openings hold framed plywood flaps on hinges that open like hopper windows. A metal bar extends the width of the openings to lock the flaps closed. The southwest (side) elevation has a single-leaf plywood door with cross-bracing. The building has no other fenestration.

OLD TICKET BOOTH

A prefabricated shed is located west of the ticket booth. Based on its form and materials, it appears that this shed was constructed c. 1990. This wood-frame structure is clad in T-111 siding and capped by a gable roof of asphalt shingles. The northeast elevation has two openings with square-edge wood surrounds. The openings are covered by pieces of plywood. The northwest elevation has a single-leaf door opening (no door) with a square-edge wood surround. The building has no additional fenestration.

SOFTBALL FIELD

The softball field is located north of the school. The field includes a dirt infield and a metal fence along the foul lines. Metal benches are located on either side of the field for participants. The field does not have an outfield fence.

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FOOTBALL FIELD

Located within the track is a football field. The natural turf field runs north-south and includes H-style goals at either end of the field. Metal bleachers are located on the west side of the field and includes a score box.

SCOREBOARD

A scoreboard is located on the southern end of the football field and outside of the track. Based on its form and materials, it appears that this scoreboard dates from the late twentieth century. The metal scoreboard is supported by metal and wooden posts. It reads: Welcome to FAIRMONT HEIGHTS. Advertisements for Coca-Cola flank the welcome sign. Beneath the scoreboard is a smaller sign with Washington Redskins logos that reads: THIS FIELD PROUDLY MAINTAINED BY.

TENNIS COURTS

Located southeast of the school are two tennis courts. Based on historical aerials, the courts were installed c. 1975.³ The asphalt courts are surrounded by a tall, chain-link fence.

INTEGRITY ASSESSMENT

Fairmont Heights High School presents a moderate level of integrity of materials, workmanship, and design as a result of the 1983 renovation and additions. The changes made to the school at that time were sympathetic to the original design of the school. Overall, the building maintains its original form as well as its interior configuration. It is typical for schools to change the location of academic departments as programs develop. The building maintains a high degree of integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association as an integral component of the Fairmount Heights neighborhood. Located on one of the largest parcels in the area, the school is a local landmark and gathering place for students, families, and the community at large. Fairmont Heights High School maintains an enrollment of approximately 1,000 students and remains an active force in the development of the community of Fairmount Heights.

Overall, Fairmont Heights High School presents a moderate level of integrity.

¹ "Fairmont Heights High School to celebrate 60th Anniversary," The Sentinel Newspapers, <http://www.thesentinel.com/pgs/fairmont-heights-anniversary> (accessed January 13, 2010).

² "Prince George's paying more to build smaller area school," Gazette.Net, http://www.gazette.net/stories/10152009/landnew173749_32526.shtml (accessed January 13, 2010).

³ Historic Maps/Coverage, Historic Aerials, <http://www.historicaerials.com/Default.aspx>, (accessed January 12, 2010).

8. Significance

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Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> health/medicine	<input type="checkbox"/> performing arts
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1999	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment/ recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 2000-	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ethnic heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/ settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social history
	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning		<input type="checkbox"/> maritime history	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation		<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: <u>Local History</u>

Specific dates 1950 **Architect/Builder** Paul H. Kea Associates

Construction dates 1950, 1951, 1956, 1983

Evaluation for:

National Register

Maryland Register

not evaluated

Prepare a one-paragraph summary statement of significance addressing applicable criteria, followed by a narrative discussion of the history of the resource and its context. (For compliance projects, complete evaluation on a DOE Form – see manual.)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Fairmont Heights High School opened in September 1950 at 1401 Nye Street in Capitol Heights and was originally known as Fairmont Heights Junior-Senior High School. Constructed as the larger of two high schools for African American students in Prince George's County, Fairmont Heights was the culmination of many years of struggle for the area's African American citizens seeking a modern school facility equal to those schools attended by white students. Serving the western part of the County, Fairmont Heights was the first to offer the twelfth grade to its African American students. Under the leadership of its first principal, G. James Gholson, the students were confronted with a broad curriculum focused on the humanities. With the landmark United States Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954), Fairmont Heights High School became the local focus for numerous initiatives over almost twenty years to desegregate the schools of Prince George's County. Such initiatives included the "freedom of choice" plan, becoming a "Model Urban School," and extensive busing of students to and from area schools. In 1972, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and the American Civil Liberties Union filed a class action suit on behalf of all African American students, for nine African American parents (one did not sign the affidavit), of students residing in the immediate community. John Williams, President of the Fairmont Park, North Englewood, Chapel Oaks Civic Association and Jesse Warr, newly elected first Black member of the School Board, recruited all plaintiffs. Williams served as lead plaintiff, though the suit was filed in the name of Sylvester Vaughns because Williams was the only plaintiff employed by Prince George's County Schools. The action sought to further eliminate segregation within the County's schools. *Vaughns v. Board of Education of Prince George's County*, 355 F.Supp. 1034, 1037 (D.Md.1972), resulted in the transfer of approximately 32,863 students in an effort to abolish the last vestiges of the dual-school system. Several efforts to close the school in the 1970s and a proposal to change the name of the school in 1983 were thwarted by the dedication of students, faculty, alumni, and community. Fairmont Heights High School retains sufficient integrity to convey its significance as the only remaining secondary school for African American students constructed under the dual-school system in Prince George's County and the first to offer grades 9-12. It is further significant for the role it played in the desegregation fight in Prince George's County beginning in 1954 and ending in the mid-1970s. It is a significant landmark as a point of pride and achievement in the African-American community.

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HISTORIC CONTEXT

Fairmont Heights High School is located in the community of Fairmont Heights; however, it has a Capitol Heights mailing address and is associated with the Fairmont Park-North Englewood-Chapel Oak Communities. The United States Postal Service assigned the present Capitol Heights mailing address in 1984. Fairmont Heights is an early-twentieth-century African-American suburb located just outside the easternmost corner of the District of Columbia in Prince George's County. The community is roughly bounded by Sheriff Road, Balsamtree Drive, 62nd Place, and Eastern Avenue.

In the late nineteenth century, the area that would become Fairmont Heights was the site of several small farms owned by the Wilson, Silence, Hoover, Brown, and Wiessner families. These farms were purchased and consolidated by land speculators in the first decades of the twentieth century. Fairmont Heights contains six subdivisions platted between 1900 and 1923 by different developers. The first was platted as Fairmont Heights in 1900 by Robinson White and Allen Clark, two white attorneys and developers from Washington, D.C. The initial platting contained approximately 50 acres that were divided into lots typically measuring 25 by 125 feet.⁴

Robinson White and Allen Clark encouraged African Americans to settle in the area and the subdivision became one of the first planned communities for black families in the Washington, D.C. area. White and Clark sold the affordable lots making home ownership attainable for many black families. Early on, the neighborhood was home to several prominent African Americans including William Sidney Pittman, a noted architect and son-in-law of Booker T. Washington. Pittman took an active interest in the development of his own neighborhood. He formed the Fairmont Heights Improvement Company to construct a social center for the community. Pittman had Charity Hall constructed, which was used for social events, as a church, and as the community's first school.⁵

In 1908, the Washington, Baltimore and Annapolis Electric Railway opened, providing easy access for commuters into Washington, D.C. Residents of Fairmont Heights used the neighboring Gregory Station, located in Seat Pleasant.⁶ African Americans, encouraged by the development in Fairmont Heights, soon settled in the area. In addition to the Pittmans, James F. Armstrong (supervisor of Colored Schools in Prince George's County), Henry Pinckney (White House steward to President Theodore Roosevelt), and Doswell Brooks (supervisor of Colored Schools in Prince George's County and the first African American appointed to the Prince George's County Board of Education) all constructed houses in the neighborhood. Fairmont Heights was also home to a growing professional community and many residents worked as clerks or messengers for the federal government. The increased growth in the community created a pressing need for a dedicated school which resulted in the construction of the Fairmont Heights Elementary School. Designed by William Sidney Pittman, the school opened in 1912.⁷ Because of the large number of families moving to Fairmont Heights, the original school proved too small and a new elementary school opened in 1934.⁸

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In 1935, William Hiller conveyed 24.70 acres that was eventually to become Fairmont Heights High School to George I. Eppard and Louise A. Eppard.⁹ However, at this time the property was wooded and there was no need for the construction of a high school.

George I. Eppard, born in 1883 in McGaheysville, Virginia, moved to Washington, D.C., as a youth. In 1911, Eppard graduated from the George Washington University Medical School after receiving his undergraduate degree from there as well.¹⁰ The Eppards lived at 601 Minnesota Avenue, N.E., raising a large family of four sons and six daughters.¹¹ George I. Eppard, Jr. was a distinguished member of the District of Columbia's Accident Investigation Unit, serving as Unit Corporal. Another son, Leonard C. Eppard, was a doctor in Lorton, Virginia.¹²

Eppard served as a member of the Washington Committee on Medical Service, a committee composed of 21 prominent District of Columbia physicians organized during World War II (1939-1945). The doctors were assigned to each of the 25 districts set up by the committee identical with the 25 geographical divisions of the Selective Service System. Each of these doctors was responsible for the periodical check and report of their respective districts. Theodore Wipurd, secretary of the Washington Committee on Medical Service, stated, "Because of the scarcity of doctors due to the unusual number who have entered the armed services, this method of systematic checking is expected to be invaluable in the control of possible epidemics, mass injuries, or enemy action." Dr. George I. Eppard was assigned districts 23 and 24.¹³

In 1947, the Eppards conveyed approximately 15 acres to The Board of Education of Prince George's County and retired to Compton, Maryland.¹⁴

Fairmont Heights High School was designed by the architectural firm of Paul H. Kea Associates. Paul H. Kea (1886-1968) was born in Surry County, Virginia and studied architecture under private tutors in Surry County. At the age of 35, Kea opened his own architectural office in Portsmouth, Virginia and by 1929, he moved his practice to Hyattsville, Maryland. During this time, Kea is credited with the design of more than 50 public schools in Prince George's County, the First Baptist Church of Hyattsville, the Hyattsville Municipal Building, the County Courthouse and the Board of Education buildings in Upper Marlboro and the Prince George's General Hospital. Kea was director of public works under the Council of Defense during World War II. A fellow of the American Institute of Architects, Kea was instrumental in the founding of the Potomac Valley chapter of the American Institute of Architects in Maryland in 1955. In that same year, Kea was appointed to the AIA's National Committee for the Preservation of Historic Buildings.

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Fairmont Heights High School opened in September of 1950 as Fairmont Heights Junior-Senior High School and replaced the Lakeland High School. With the construction of Fairmont Heights, Lakeland High School became a junior high and elementary school.¹⁵ The use of “Fairmont” versus “Fairmount”, as the town is spelled, dates back to 1924, one year before the Town of Fairmount Height was incorporated. According to ex-Mayor Robert Gray, the contractor for the original elementary school erred when constructing the school’s sign and forgot the “u”. When the high school was constructed the “u” was also dropped from the name for continuity with Fairmont Heights Elementary School (no longer extant).¹⁶ It was one of two high schools for African-American students in Prince George’s County, with the purpose to serve western Prince George’s County. Opening-day enrollment was 738 students.¹⁷ During the 1950s, Fairmont Heights was attended by two-thirds of the African American high school students in the county who were bused in from as far as Accokeek in the south, Bowie in the east, and Laurel in the north. The remaining students attended Frederick Douglass High School, an older and smaller institution located in Upper Marlboro.¹⁸

G. James Gholson served as the first principal of the new school, a post he held until 1969.¹⁹ A graduate of Hampton Institute in Virginia, Gholson integrated the lessons he learned there with his teaching philosophy at Fairmont Heights. He instituted a curriculum influenced by the humanities, stating later that, “our feeling was that education was a total process – involving a Broadway play, a walk in the garment district – not just the cramming of facts into a student’s head. Facts should help you with living.”²⁰ Gholson further instituted the “core method,” a program that at the time was only used in a few private schools. This method set aside three-hour blocks of time for students and teachers to approach issues by using the Socratic dialogue approach. Such issues taken up were “the good life, the morality of peace and war and the nature of economic relations in a democratic society.”²¹ He left Fairmont Heights High School in 1969 after taking a job as an administrative assistant at the superintendent’s office. He is credited with doing a masterful job of carefully steering Fairmont Heights during the tumultuous early integration years.²²

Fairmont Heights High School was a point of pride for the Town of Fairmount Heights and African Americans living in western Prince George’s County. The first high school in the county to offer twelve grades to African-American children, Fairmont Heights High School was the “fulfillment of a dream for Black citizens who had campaigned actively for many years for a modern high school in the county.”²³ This belief was reflected by the support it received and the boost in enrollment through the 1960s. As enrollment grew to 1,900 students by early 1960, portable classrooms were constructed to handle the overflow. In 1961, the 7th and 8th grades were moved to the new Mary McLeod Bethune Junior High School, which was built two blocks away. The ninth grade followed suit a year later allowing Fairmont to become a senior high school.²⁴ Among the first scholars of Fairmont Heights High School was a talented young music student by the name of Marvin Pentz Gay, Jr., better known by his stage name, Marvin Gaye.

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In 1954, the landmark Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*, outlawed the racial segregation of secondary public school systems. Following the decision, William Schmidt, the Superintendent of Schools, informed his employees that the Prince George's County schools would continue to operate as always. His position was later sanctioned by the Board of Education, who also adopted and approved a statement indicating that the County schools would continue to be racially segregated. This was made possible because of inaction by the state, which had concluded that the State Board of Education would officially comply with the ruling, but the implementation would be left to the individual county school districts. In 1955, to adhere to the ruling, the initial response by the Prince George's County School system was to implement the "freedom of choice" plan. The plan boiled down to students being assigned transportation to their original schools, however, a student could transfer out to a school closer to their home if a parent applied for a transfer to the Board. It was a flawed plan, and transfers were routinely denied.

The State Board of Education continued to experiment with solutions to the Supreme Court decision and adopted a plan in 1965 to "produce a unitary school system which would be operated without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin." Described as "freedom of choice with incremental school districting," the plan was approved in 1966 by the U.S. Office of Education for the upcoming school year. However, in 1968, the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) told the Board that by September 1969, a resolution was to be implemented to "eliminate all vestiges of segregated public schools."²⁵ This deadline soon passed and a new deadline was imposed by HEW and set for complete desegregation at the secondary school level by September 1970. This new plan suggested the closure of Fairmont Heights High School and the busing of its 928 students to neighboring Central and Bladensburg High Schools. The old high school would then be utilized as a junior high school for students coming from Mary McLeod Bethune Junior High and Bladensburg Junior High.²⁶

In June 1969, the Prince George's County School Board delayed a decision on the proposed closure of Fairmont Heights High School in order to begin the planning to make Fairmont Heights a "model urban school." William Schmidt, the Superintendent of Schools, acknowledged the strong resistance to the closure and decided to employ a plan designed by four students of the Harvard Graduate School of Education with the intent of attracting white students through open enrollment with the incentive of an enriched curriculum. Though the plan was fiercely opposed initially by many members of the Fairmont Heights faculty, the Board forged ahead and hired Alvin V. Fortune, a Newton, Massachusetts, high school teacher as the new principal and Kenneth Mostow, an attorney, as an assistant principal. These men were coupled with Todd Endow and Joseph Walsh, Harvard Graduate School of Education students who would also serve as assistant principals, and were tasked with planning the model school for the school year of 1971-1972.²⁷

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The appointment of Fortune as the new principal of Fairmont Heights High School was immediately challenged by the Prince George's County Education Association on the grounds that Fortune lacked the specified requirements to serve in the post. However, the student body and faculty rallied around him. A petition, signed by 853 out of 960 students, stated that "we feel that Mr. Alvin Fortune is the best thing that has happened to Fairmont Heights High School in a long time...we will do everything within our moral and legal rights to stop any decision removing him." In light of Fortune's overwhelming support, a resolution was made by the Association to delay any action to remove Fortune from his post until the end of the 1969-1970 school year.²⁸ Ultimately, the "Model Urban School" plan was scrapped in January 1970 by William Schmidt who cited fiscal issues.²⁹ After two years as principal, Fortune was transferred to a junior high school and was succeeded by Dr. Donald A. Kiah in 1972.³⁰

Mandatory desegregation began with the 1970-1971 school year. The attendance zones of Fairmont Heights High School and Mary Bethune Junior High School were re-drawn in order for both schools to have an almost equal number of white and black students. Further, in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, the Supreme Court ruled that busing and re-drawing attendance zones were legitimate solutions to the racial imbalance of schools. However, at Fairmont Heights High School, it became quite common for students to subvert their transfer to the school by exploiting loop holes in the transfer process. The result of these loose transfer policies was a drop to 21.4% white students enrolled at Fairmont Heights High School.³¹

By August 1971, HEW found that Prince George's County was out of compliance with its mandates and began proceedings to restrict \$14 million in federal funds that the district typically received each year. Following President Richard Nixon's statement of opposition to busing as a means to integrate schools in March 1972, HEW backed down on its threat to block to Prince George's County \$14 million in annual federal aid. However, hearings would continue to determine whether the County was in compliance with the Supreme Court rulings.³²

On March 29, 1972, lawyers for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and the American Civil Liberties Union filed a suit in Baltimore U.S. District Court on behalf of eight black parents of County students, *Vaughns v. Board of Education of Prince George's County*. The suit sought the further desegregation of Prince George's County Schools.³³ The lead plaintiff and organizer of the suit was John J. Williams, a language teacher at Fairmont Heights High School since 1962.³⁴ However, since Williams was the only plaintiff employed by the school system, the plaintiffs decided it best to not file the suit under William's name, instead choosing Sylvester Vaughns. In July, Judge Frank A. Kaufman of the federal court in Baltimore found that Prince George's County had not been in compliance and that a desegregation plan needed to be produced by August 22. Bowing to pressure from county school officials, Kaufman extended the deadline to December 4 and insisted that desegregation plans be implemented by January 29, 1973. Chief Judge Clement F. Haynsworth of the U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, Virginia, upheld the decision in October.³⁵ By the designated deadline, the County school board proposed the transfer of

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approximately 34,000 students; however, Judge Kaufman indicated that this was “sloppy” with too many uncalled-for transfers and excessive busing. Several weeks later, a mutual decision was reached between Kaufman and the County school board which would require the transfer of approximately 32,863 students beginning on January 29, 1973. Several days later, the NAACP and ACLU deemed the decision made in *Vaughns v. Board of Education of Prince George’s County*, as adequate.³⁶

In 1972, as a result of the Desegregation Order as written by Judge Kaufman, many of the faculty and students of Fairmont Heights High School were transferred to other schools. The desegregation of Prince George’s County schools nineteen years after *Brown v. Board of Education* was hindered by covert racist attitudes, segregated housing patterns, and “white flight” prevalent in the county.³⁷ The 1970s were marked by five separate attempts to close the high school and send its students to neighboring schools. Each time the School Board proposed a plan to close the school, the community rallied together, and with the aid of local political leaders, such as Nathaniel Exum (Member, Maryland House of Delegates, 1975-1999 and member of the state Senate since 1999), and Decatur Trotter (a Maryland State Senator from 1983-1999), and alumni including Tommie Broadwater (the first African American from Prince George’s County elected to the State Senate serving from 1974-1983) was able to convince the Board that the school was seen as a landmark by the African-American community and must be allowed to survive.³⁸ Deborah Franklin, a 1970 graduate of the school stated, “Every time (the school board tried to close the school), people would come out in big numbers and then (the school board) would back down. There’s a lot of emotion tied up in the school. People felt that it was something that needed to be maintained.”³⁹

On January 4, 1980, a fire at Fairmont Heights High School caused severe damage to the interior of the building. The school was closed and students transferred to the unused Kent Junior High School building a few miles to the east while the school was renovated. In the fall of 1983, following \$8,400,000 in renovations, Fairmont Heights High School re-opened. Renovations consisted of the installation of air-conditioning, new windows, a library media center, exercise and weight training rooms, computer labs, music facilities, refurbished classrooms, and brighter hallways. During the renovation, Mary McLeod Bethune Junior High School closed, thus ensuring that Fairmont Heights would again become a four-year high school.⁴⁰

In 1983, the school board unanimously approved to change the name of Fairmont Heights High School to Jesse J. Warr High School, after the first African American member elected to the school board and a leader during the desegregation era in Prince George’s County. Warr had died in 1976. Other reasons given for the re-naming of the school included ending the confusion of how to spell “Fairmont” vs. “Fairmount,” and a promise school board member Bonnie Johns had given Warr’s surviving family members and his North Englewood community to name the school after him. The name change was to go into effect in 1984. The change was met with fierce opposition from current students and faculty, alumni, and community members. Opponents were clear that they were not against the commemoration of Warr’s legacy, but the name “Fairmont Heights” was more significant. Delegate Sylvania Woods, Jr., whose

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district encompassed the area around the school and town stated, “There’s no question that Jesse Warr was a great man...but it would be the same as turning Howard University into Martin Luther King University.”⁴¹ Lawrence Jackson, an alumnus of the school and son of the first vice principal emphatically said during a school board meeting, “Fairmont Heights has guided us. As we do not change a family name, we should not change that of Fairmont Heights.”⁴² It is clear that strong support for “Fairmont Heights” and testimonies by numerous students, faculty, alumni, and community members swayed the board to table the motion to re-name the school.

In 2007, a feasibility study was conducted to determine if a new Fairmont Heights High School should be constructed for the community. After reviewing the four options presented in the Feasibility Study and hearing the concerns of residents at the February 14, 2007 public hearing, the determination was made to construct a school on a new site. Primary issues voiced were the age of the existing facility, instructional impediments to learning, and athletic and training needs. The Prince George’s County Public Schools’ staff recommendations were as follows:

- 1) Build a new school on a new site
- 2) Renovate, modernize, and preserve the existing building as a facility for learning, community use, alumni use, and athletics
- 3) The existing facility could remain as a museum to celebrate black achievement in Prince George’s County

Fairmont Heights High School currently has approximately 1,000 students in grades 9-12. According to the school’s website, the “curriculum is a highly structured, comprehensive liberal arts program of study that is enhanced by a JROTC Program, an Academy of Finance, and a Bio-Technology Magnet Program. The school has provided the educational foundation for alumni who serve the larger community in a broad spectrum of capacities, including public office, business, education, authorship, law, medicine, sports, film and more.”⁴³ Alumna Deborah Franklin stated, “You could go into any area of Washington, D.C., and say, “I am a student at Fairmont Heights,” and it meant something, set little bells going off in people’s heads.”⁴⁴

⁴ Susan G. Pearl, “Fairmont Heights: A History From its Beginnings (1900) to Incorporation (1935)” (Upper Marlboro, MD: M-NCPPC, 1991), 1.

⁵ George Denny, Jr., *Proud Past, Promising Future: Cities and Towns in Prince George’s County, Maryland* (Brentwood, MD: George D. Denny, Jr., 1997), 171-172.

⁶ Pearl, “Fairmont Heights,” 12.

⁷ George Denny, Jr., *Proud Past, Promising Future: Cities and Towns in Prince George’s County, Maryland* (Brentwood, MD: George D. Denny, Jr., 1997), 171-172.

⁸ Denny, *Proud Past, Promising Future*, 173.

⁹ William Hiller to George I. Eppard and Louisa Eppard, Prince George’s County Land Records, 430:4.

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¹⁰ "Dr. George I. Eppard, D.C. Area Physician." *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, December 29, 1969, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed December 17, 2009).

¹¹ "Man Refuses Treatment In Hospital, Then Dies." *The Washington Post (1877-1954)*, August 10, 1935, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed December 17, 2009).

¹² "Murder Victim's Photo Used To Trap 2 Robbery Suspects." *The Washington Post and Times Herald (1954-1959)*, April 4, 1954, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed December 17, 2009).

¹³ "Medical Service Group Begins Work on Postwar Program." *The Washington Post (1877-1954)*, July 9, 1943, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed December 17, 2009).

¹⁴ George I. Eppard and Louisa Eppard to The Board of Education of Prince George's County, Prince George's County Land Records, 970:265.

¹⁵ "Prince Georges Double-Shift Classes to End: New School Openings In September to Cut Problem in County," *The Washington Post (1877-1954)*, January 30, 1950, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed January 12, 2010).

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¹⁷ Prince George's County Public Schools, "Fairmount Heights," Office of Communication, <http://unitus.org/FULL/Fairmount%20Heightsbooklet.pdf>, (accessed December 17, 2009).

¹⁸ Leon Wynter, *Washington Post* Staff Writer, "Rebuilding a Legacy at Fairmont Heights," *The Washington Post (1974-Current file)*, February 19, 1981, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed January 13, 2010).

¹⁹ Letter by Patricia J. Fletcher to the Prince George's County Board of Education, July 29, 2009.

²⁰ Margaret Shapiro, *Washington Post* Staff Writer, "Systematic Approach To His Life And Career: Systematic Methods Built Gholson's Life and Career," *The Washington Post (1974-Current file)*, July 12, 1979, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed January 12, 2010).

²¹ Leon Wynter, *Washington Post* Staff Writer, "Rebuilding a Legacy at Fairmont Heights," *The Washington Post (1974-Current file)*, February 19, 1981, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed January 13, 2010).

²² Margaret Shapiro, *Washington Post* Staff Writer, "Systematic Approach To His Life And Career: Systematic Methods Built Gholson's Life and Career," *The Washington Post (1974-Current file)*, July 12, 1979, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed January 12, 2010).

²³ Prince George's County Public Schools, "Fairmount Heights," Office of Communication, <http://unitus.org/FULL/Fairmount%20Heightsbooklet.pdf>, (accessed December 17, 2009).

²⁴ Prince George's County Public Schools, "Fairmount Heights," Office of Communication, <http://unitus.org/FULL/Fairmount%20Heightsbooklet.pdf>, (accessed December 17, 2009).

²⁵ Alvin Thornton and Karen Williams Gooden, *Like A Phoenix I'll Rise: An Illustrated History of African Americans in Prince George's County, Maryland, 1696-1996*, Donning Company Publishers: Virginia Beach, VA, 148.

²⁶ Peter Osnos, *Washington Post* Staff Writer, "Pr. George's Gets 2d HEW School Plan: Pr. George's Gets HEW School Plan." *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, April 11, 1969, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed January 12, 2010).

²⁷ Lawrence Meyer, and *Washington Post* Staff Writer, "County Delays Fairmont High Action." *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, June 25, 1969, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed January 12, 2010).

²⁸ Alexander Ward, *Washington Post* Staff Writer, "Fortune's Ouster Delayed," *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, September 23, 1969, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed January 12, 2010).

²⁹ Lawrence Meyer, *Washington Post* Staff Writer, "School Program Scrapped: Pr. George's Board Scraps School Plan," *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, April 22, 1970, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed January 12, 2010).

³⁰ Prince George's County Public Schools, "Fairmount Heights," Office of Communication, <http://unitus.org/FULL/Fairmount%20Heightsbooklet.pdf>, (accessed December 17, 2009).

³¹ "Events Leading To School Order," *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, December 30, 1972, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed January 12, 2010).

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³² "Events Leading To School Order," *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, December 30, 1972, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed January 12, 2010).

³³ "Events Leading To School Order," *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, December 30, 1972, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed January 12, 2010).

³⁴ John J. Williams taught at Fairmont Heights High School until 1992 and now serves as the President of the Fairmont Heights High School Alumni Association.

³⁵ Bart Barnes, *Washington Post* Staff Writer, "Long Integration Fight Ends: Prince George's Was 'Old South' 19 Years Ago." *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, January 28, 1973, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed January 12, 2010).

³⁶ "Events Leading To School Order," *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, December 30, 1972, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed January 12, 2010).

³⁷ School Integration in Prince George's County, Maryland, <http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/school-integration/pgcounty/index.html>, (accessed December 17, 2009).

³⁸ Prince George's County Public Schools, "Fairmount Heights," Office of Communication, <http://unitus.org/FULL/Fairmount%20Heightsbooklet.pdf>, (accessed December 17, 2009).

³⁹ Leon Wynter, *Washington Post* Staff Writer, "Rebuilding a Legacy at Fairmont Heights," *The Washington Post (1974-Current file)*, February 19, 1981, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed January 13, 2010).

⁴⁰ Prince George's County Public Schools, "Fairmount Heights," Office of Communication, <http://unitus.org/FULL/Fairmount%20Heightsbooklet.pdf>, (accessed December 17, 2009).

⁴¹ Leon Wynter, *Washington Post* Staff Writer, "Proposed Name Change for School Has Fairmont Heights Fans Furious," *The Washington Post (1974-Current file)*, November 10, 1983, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed January 13, 2010).

⁴² Leon Wynter, *Washington Post* Staff Writer, "P.G. Approves Plan to Raise Scores on SATs," *The Washington Post (1974-Current file)*, November 11, 1983, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed January 13, 2010).

⁴³ Fairmont Heights High School, "Academic Overview," <http://www1.pgcps.org/fairmontheights/index.aspx?id=6076>, (accessed December 17, 2009).

⁴⁴ Leon Wynter, *Washington Post* Staff Writer, "Rebuilding a Legacy at Fairmont Heights," *The Washington Post (1974-Current file)*, February 19, 1981, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed January 13, 2010).

9. Major Bibliographical References

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Office of Communications. "Fairmount Heights." Prince George's County Public Schools. February 2006.
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The Washington Post.
Williams, John. Interview with authors.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of surveyed property	<u>14.90</u>	
Acreage of historical setting	<u>14.90</u>	
Quadrangle name	<u>Washington East</u>	Quadrangle scale: <u>1:24000</u>

Verbal boundary description and justification

The Fairmont Heights High School is located in Capitol Heights, Prince George's County, Maryland on a 14.90-acre parcel of land. The property is bounded by Nye Street on the south and North Englewood Drive to the west. A line of mature trees delineates the eastern and northern bounds of the property. The Fairmont Heights High School has been associated with Tax Parcel 4 as noted on Tax Map 58 since its construction in 1950.

11. Form Prepared by

name/title	Paul Weishar, Maria Dayton, and Jeanne Barnes, Architectural Historians		
organization	EHT Traceries, Inc. for M-NCPPC	date	January 2010
street & number	1121 Fifth Street, NW	telephone	(202) 393-1199
city or town	Washington	state	DC

The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust
Maryland Department of Planning
100 Community Place
Crownsville, MD 21032-2023
410-514-7600

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CHAIN OF TITLE
PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY LAND RECORDS

Deed 430:4 May 31, 1935	William Hiller, widower to George I. Eppard and Louisa A. Eppard. (containing 24.70 acres, together "with the building and improvements thereupon")
Deed 970:265 October 3, 1947	George I. Eppard and Louise A. Eppard (his wife) to The Board of Education of Prince George's County (15.152 acres)

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Photo: Fairmont Heights High School, Capitol Heights, view of the façade, looking northeast.
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Photo: Fairmont Heights High School and Flagpole, Capitol Heights, looking north. (December 2009)

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Photo: Fairmont Heights High School, Capitol Heights, view of the southern corner, looking northwest.
(December 2009)

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Photo: Fairmont Heights High School, Capitol Heights, view of the western corner, looking east.
(December 2009)

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Photo: Fairmont Heights High School, Capitol Heights, view of the northern corner, looking southeast.
(December 2009)

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Photo: Fairmont Heights High School, sheltered access beneath northeast corner of school, looking northeast. (December 2009).

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Photo: Fairmont Heights High School, Capitol Heights, view of northeast (rear) elevation, looking southwest. (December 2009).

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Photo: Ticket Booth, Capitol Heights, façade (southeast elevation), looking northwest. (December 2009)

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December 2009: Shed, Capitol Heights, looking southeast. (December 2009)

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Photo: Metal Sign, Capitol Heights, looking north. (December 2009)

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Photo: Brick Sign, Capitol Heights, looking north. (December 2009)

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Photo: Softball Field, Capitol Heights, viewed from the north. (December 2009)

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Photo: Tennis Courts, Capitol Heights, viewed from the south. (December 2009)

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Photo: Track, Stands, and Score Box, Capitol Heights, looking south. (December 2009)

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Photo: Football Field and Scoreboard, Capitol Heights, viewed from the north. (December 2009)

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Photo: Main Lobby, Fairmont Heights High School. (January 2010)

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Photo: Hallway, Fairmont Heights High School. (January 2010)

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Photo: Canted Corner, Fairmont Heights High School. (January 2010)

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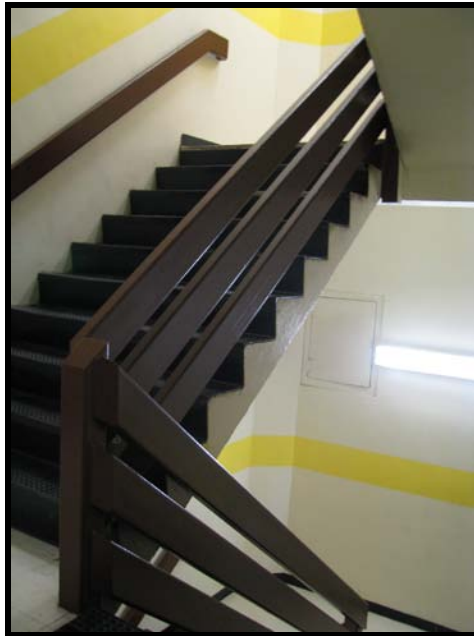


Photo: Interior Stairwell, Fairmont Heights High School. (January 2010)

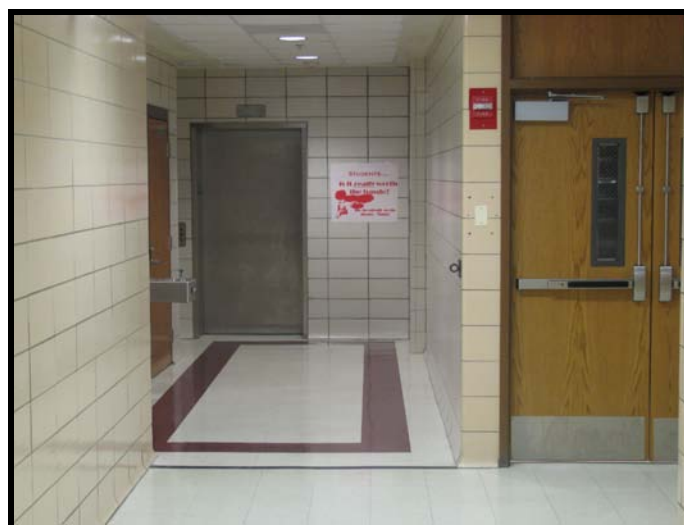


Photo: Elevator, Fairmont Heights High School. (January 2010)

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Photo: Gymnasium, Fairmont Heights High School. (January 2010)



Photo: Cafeteria, Fairmont Heights High School. (January 2010)

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Photo: JROTC Classroom, Fairmont Heights High School. (January 2010)



Photo: Library, Fairmont Heights High School. (January 2010)

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Photo: Computer Lab, Fairmont Heights High School. (January 2010)



Photo: Science Lab, Fairmont Heights High School. (January 2010)