

MCPS Operating Budget Northwood Cluster

Good evening. I am Jennifer Chambers, one of three cluster coordinators for the Northwood Cluster. We appreciate this opportunity to provide feedback on the FY2009 MCPS Operating Budget. We thank the BOE and MCPS for inviting another important stakeholder, MCCPTA (the parents), to the budget preparation table.

We are pleased to see more money invested into Middle School Reform, additional elementary school vice-principals, additional personnel for special education, more elementary school counselors, additional parent outreach coordinators and lunch hour aides, and increased investment in the SEPA and PBIS programs.

Middle School Reform

The Northwood Cluster continues its support for Middle School Reform. We are glad to see nine additional schools will receive money to implement initiatives to engage student learning and increase student achievement. However, we want a better understanding of the criteria MCPS is using to select these nine schools. Silver Spring International Middle School is not one of the five schools to have received Middle School Reform; however, they have benefited from many components of it that have helped to engage student learning. Attached is a letter from SSI PTSA about Middle School Reform and other FY2009 Operating Budget issues important to them.

The hiring of math specialists to provide teacher training and to support middle school math teachers is a crucial component of this reform. Math specialists are especially needed to achieve MCPS's goal of 80% of 8th graders enrolled in Algebra by 2010. We note that elementary schools have a similar need when teaching middle school math.

The Northwood Cluster agrees with aspects of the Middle School Magnet Consortium (MSMC) that have engaged student learning and improved achievement. We continue to express dissatisfaction with the unequal balance of programs in the DCC middle schools. We are glad that MCPS will respond by investing in the DCC middle schools without special programs. We believe that the MSMC is only effective if all middle schools are on an equal playing field with one another. We also believe this to be true for high schools in the DCC.

As mentioned in last year's operating budget testimony, the Northwood Cluster is dissatisfied with MCPS's lack of meaningful and critical evaluation of its initiatives and pilot programs. It is vital, particularly given the challenging budget problems, for MCPS to use evaluation criteria and methods that truly evaluate the effectiveness of its initiatives.

Hiring and Retaining Highly Qualified Staff

While we agree with MCPS that its highest priority should be its teaching staff, we are disappointed to see that MCPS has not developed new initiatives to increase the pool of highly qualified teachers, particularly in Math and Science, or to retain highly qualified teachers in the DCC. MCPS needs to step forward and be more innovative in its hiring and retention efforts.

Parent Community Outreach Coordinators

The Northwood Cluster would like to thank MCPS for responding to our request for additional Parent Community Coordinators. Parent Community Coordinators are essential to our school

communities: to help parents navigate the school system, to foster inclusiveness among all families in the school, and to foster student achievement by encouraging more parent involvement in the school. Six additional parent community coordinators are a start, but additional coordinators are needed to support the needs of our cluster.

Maintenance

Finally, as we have stated before, while more funds need to be allocated for school maintenance, MCPS continues to neglect this area. Many of our school buildings are aging and require significant attention to their maintenance needs. For example, Silver Spring International has insufficient maintenance workers. 8.5 FTE is insufficient to handle the size of this property. These workers cannot keep up with the 200 work orders that have been submitted since the beginning of the school year, in addition to their daily work.

Thank you for listening and your consideration.

Jennifer Chambers
Pam Megna
Stacy Menendez

Northwood Cluster Coordinators



Silver Spring
International PTSA
313 Wayne Avenue
Silver Spring, Md. 20910

January 9, 2008

The Silver Spring International Middle School (SSI) PTSA appreciates MCPS's support of our school community and programs, and believes that with continued support SSI can become a model of middle-school reform. The proposed Operating Budget contains a number of initiatives to continue the gains made through middle school reform. It also includes cuts to special programs that we believe are essential to establishing excellence in our school: the IB Middle Years Programme and French and Spanish Immersion. This letter highlights our support for several budget initiatives and also raises our concerns.

Reduce Immersion Positions

SSI currently serves over 100 students who choose to continue the immersion program from the elementary-school programs. Many of these students reside outside of the boundary. Since SSI opened in 1999 parents have worked continually to strengthen the link between the elementary and middle school programs. The decrease of 2.0 positions across the 12 elementary and middle schools with immersion programs threatens to weaken instruction and increase the difficulty in attracting and keeping qualified staff. Unless current immersion staff receives added release time for translation, they will need to translate and prepare for courses on their own time. The lack of preparation time contributed to the resignation of the entire immersion/foreign language staff at SSI in 2001. Even with current staffing at the schools and central office it is not possible to add more than 5 or 6 new foreign language titles to the library each year since the same limited staff must review all new titles for

appropriateness - in their own time. Since 2004 staffing for French and Spanish immersion at SSI has begun to stabilize. It would be very detrimental to the program at the elementary and middle-school levels, and therefore detrimental to Silver Spring International, to reduce the immersion positions.

Parent Community Coordinators

Since 2005 SSI has had a Parent Community Coordinator whose focus has been on engaging the Spanish-speaking community as well as other parent involvement activities. We strongly support funding the initiative to place Parent Community Coordinators at additional highly impacted schools.

Middle School Reform/Expansion of MSMC Courses to Other Middle Schools

We applaud the planned expansion of the middle school reform initiative, including the components of programs developed at the MSMC and magnet schools that contribute to student achievement. While not part of Phase I middle school reform, SSI has benefited from a number of these initiatives including the positions of literacy coach and math content specialist, and the 6th-grade electives Lights! Camera! Literacy! and Arts Integration. We believe that the level of engagement of our students has increased, and the PTSA supports the extension of these programs to our 7th- and 8th-grade students.

Reduce Additional Release Periods in Middle School Special Programs

Having received authorization from the IBO in early 2007, SSI is in its second year of full implementation of the Middle Years Programme (MYP). Since 2005, SSI has a 1.0 MYP Coordinator position to support the program. As one of the first three-year IB Middle Years Programmes in the nation, and the first in MCPS, last year SSI piloted the full-year Passion Project elective for 8th graders; in the five-year program this project is undertaken in 10th grade. This fall nearly half of our 8th graders, 137 students elected the optional, year-long Passion Project as a virtual elective and ninth class. This aspect of the MYP offers an authentic and engaging experience. It also requires extensive coordination among all participants. In addition to coordinating the Passion Projects, the MYP coordinator continues to oversee training of new staff and the expansion of the hallmark MYP design cycle projects across departments and grades. The 1.0 MYP at Silver Spring International is essential to the continued expansion and success. Over 60 teachers and staff act as their advisers. Because their advisory work extends beyond the normal class load, additional release time may be necessary to complete the work associated with the Passion Projects. Please insure that added release periods for SSI's unique three-year MYP is part of the FY 2009 budget.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the SSI PTSA,

Joseph Lipten
Blair Cluster Representative

Pat Herendeen
Northwood Cluster Representative

Jeanne Atkinson
Co-President
Silver Spring International MS

Jack Hume
Co-President
Silver Spring International MS