

# Seneca Valley Cluster

Seneca Valley High School

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School  
Roberto Clemente Middle School

Lake Seneca Elementary School

S. Christa McAuliffe Elementary School  
Dr. Sally K. Ride Elementary School  
Waters Landing Elementary School

---

Comments on

## **The Superintendent's Recommended FY 2009 Operating Budget**

Prepared by: Juan Johnson, Cluster Coordinator  
January 9, 2008

Good evening, I'm Juan Johnson, Seneca Valley Cluster Coordinator. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Superintendent's proposed FY 2009 Operating Budget.

The Seneca Valley Cluster supports the MCCPTA Operating Budget Compact and Priorities.

We strongly support:

- Middle School Reform
- Intervention and acceleration programs
- Additional guidance counselors
- The fact that all students deserve to learn in a safe, secure, clean, and healthy facility

### **Seneca Valley High School**

Seneca Valley High School is a very exciting school to attend. SVHS offers many programs to keep students engaged and provide a rigorous curriculum. We strongly urge the continued support for the career academies, college institute, and internship programs at SVHS.

As you know, Seneca Valley High School is one of two MCPS high schools that offer the Cambridge program. This is a highly popular and successful program at SVHS. Although it saddens us that the Cambridge program is being terminated in both Seneca Valley and Kennedy high schools, we are excited to have the IB program at Seneca Valley HS. We also support the continued funding of the Cambridge program for the next three years to allow the current 9<sup>th</sup> graders to complete the program. We are pleased to see the funding in the proposed budget for the IB program. These funds are needed to become certified, train the teachers and implement the Pre-IB curriculum. Having the IB program at SVHS gives MCPS an opportunity to allow students from Roberto Clemente MS whose home district is not Seneca Valley to apply for the IB program at SVHS. We feel it is necessary to give the magnet students and other highly capable students an opportunity to continue with the most rigorous course path as possible. At a minimum there should be an open application process for students currently in the RCMS Magnet Program.

### **Roberto Clemente Middle School**

RCMS is very pleased with the continued support of the programs in the school. The magnet program and Middle School Reform have been received well and are providing opportunities for increased rigor. We look forward to the addition of courses developed by the Middle School Consortium as outlined in the proposal to implement these courses in MS Reform schools in FY 2009. This should lead to these courses being offered at every middle school in the county in the near future.

RCMS has benefited from the installation of more security cameras and is pioneering the new visitor system. However, with over 1,100 students there is a need for additional security staff to provide adequate coverage.

### **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School**

MLKMS has been making progress in recent years by increasing course rigor and support for students whether it is intervention or acceleration. This has led to more students passing Algebra by the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. There is better identification of literacy issues, which are being addressed by using reading intervention programs such as Read 180. We also have seen a significant decrease in referrals and suspension this year in part to the introduction of PBIS. MLKMS is in the second year of PBIS. We support the continued funding for this program. These accomplishments have positioned MLKMS to be in a great position to apply for Phase 2 of Middle School Reform. Administration, staff and parents are excited about the opportunities Phase 2 schools will have to improve instruction and provide the highest quality programs for our students. MLKMS did meet AYP last year, however, there are some sub-groups that must be nurtured to ensure their continued success. The additional resources that Phase 2 MS Reform schools will receive in terms of staffing and training will serve the needs of MLKMS students well and will help MLKMS improve student performance.

I understand that there is no money currently in the budget to expand the IB Middle Years Program to MLKMS. However, since SVHS will be implementing IB and 5 of the middle schools that feed IB high schools have IB Middle Years, it is time to start planning for the eventual implementation of the IB Middle Years Program at MLKMS. Money and training is always the issue for new programs, but since there are middle schools with the program, the model already exists and can be easily reproduced at MLKMS. The addition of the Middle Years Program is an investment to prepare students for greater success in honors, AP and IB classes.

### **Hours Based Staffing**

MLKMS, having been a Special Education Center, has supported Hours Based Staffing to support special education students. Providing adequate staffing is vital for student success and will become even more important as special education students are attending their home schools and are participating in general education classrooms. The additional staffing will benefit all the students in the classroom. Also, counting LRE special education students in the general education population will yield the correct number of general education teachers needed to delivery quality instruction.

### **Reduced Class Size Initiative**

We have seen the benefit of reduced class size in K – 2. We are pleased to see the expansion of this initiative to other elementary schools. Added resources are required in areas of greatest need. Smaller class size is one factor that is proven to increase student performance, especially with the younger children.

### **Lunch Hour Aides**

We are in full support of more Lunch Hour Aides. We believe the safety of the children is critical. For this reason, staffing during the lunch hour is a key component to safety. It is good to see that MCPS understands that each school may have need of additional staffing based on their unique situation or the physical layout of the playground, which may have obstacles that make it difficult to see all parts of the playground at the same time. In addition to the increased staffing, MCPS must have more consistent training for lunch hour aides across all schools. Problems arise when staff is untrained, under trained, or poorly trained. Although training takes place at the school level, there should be some assistance from central office to assure a basic level of quality and knowledge by the lunch hour aides.

### **Accelerated Instruction**

With the County pushing toward the 80% Algebra attainment by 8<sup>th</sup> grade, teachers are being asked to teach higher levels of classes in elementary school. Math A is now commonly available in elementary schools and Math B is being offered in some schools. How many elementary teachers are being asked to teach course work above what they may be qualified to teach? Are they getting proper support to teach the course work at a middle school level? There needs to be more training and support so staff is equipped to provide the necessary rigor for student success. There needs to be funding for the elementary school to acquire the necessary curriculum and text books. As we accelerate students into higher level courses, please be sure to provide the resources in the elementary school to run the program at a middle school level.

As Math A and Math B are being taught in elementary school, there will be a need for Algebra 2 in the middle schools. This leads to the question of how many more high school course will eventually find their way into middle school? Some parents would like to see a more rigorous science program for middle school. Could Biology and/or Chemistry be taught in middle school? This would allow students to take more upper level science classes in high school. Will middle schools need to be able to teach foreign language at level 3? It is necessary to ensure the pathway is available as more rigorous classes are implemented in elementary and middle school.

### **Elementary School Assistant Principals**

We are in total support of Elementary Assistant Principals in every school. We have supported this position for many years. The SV cluster had experienced the challenges of an elementary school without an assistant principal. With the increased demand on principals, it is imperative to have another administrator in the building at all times. Also, in the current climate that has created new security challenges, there needs to be leadership on-site at all times. Assistant principals provide the added leadership and support to keep the schools moving in the right direction.

### **Extended Learning Opportunities**

Extended Learning Opportunities in the Middle Schools is critically important. As we increase the rigor and raise expectations, we must give opportunities for all students to succeed to the best of their ability. If it is academic intervention or enrichment, students need to be supported at their level of learning. I would like to see a list of all the programs being run by the various middle schools, also a list of all the programs currently available to middle school. Middle School Reform is supposed to bring greater student performance, but also, some consistency in programming and the sharing of best practices. Since ELO's are a priority, I'm not sure why there is a cut in the funding for these programs? How do you intend to support the needs of the students if the funding is not provided to pay staff to run the programs?

### **Maintenance**

Since there is no money in the CIP for the Seneca Valley cluster, it is imperative that maintenance is addressed timely and efficiently. It is time to evaluate all the major systems in each school and create a preventative maintenance schedule to combat more expensive repairs or replacement when a crisis happens because of a lack of proper maintenance. It is not that the maintenance department is not working efficiently, but there is a significant backlog that needs to be funded and completed, this will allow the maintenance department to work on more preventative maintenance, not crisis maintenance.

### **Conclusion**

The Seneca Valley Cluster supports efforts to increase the quality of instruction, the availability of intervention and accelerated programs in a safe, well-maintained environment. Additional staff and training is necessary to implement the initiatives currently in place and those that are coming in the future. In a tight budget year, please remember to always ask the question, "How does this affect the students?". We should all work together for the best interest and the greatest success of our children.