

## **WHITMAN CLUSTER**

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**Walt Whitman High School  
Thomas W. Pyle Middle School**

**Bannockburn Elementary School  
Bethesda Elementary School (shared)  
Bradley Hills Elementary School  
Burning Tree Elementary School  
Carderock Springs Elementary School  
Wood Acres Elementary School**

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### **FY '09 Operating Budget Testimony To The MCPS Board of Education January 16, 2007**

Good evening, President Navarro, Distinguished Members of the Board of Education and Dr. Weast. My name is Paula Robinson and with me tonight is my Cluster Co-Coordinator, Deborah Goldman. I will be speaking on behalf of the Whitman Cluster.

No one needs to remind you that our community is confronted with a difficult fiscal situation. You already know that. We are mindful and supportive of the steps the Superintendent has taken to prepare a responsible 2009 Operating Budget. As parents, we appreciate the hard work and dedication given to our children by you, and by all of the MCPS employees. We strongly support all the efforts being made to attract, retain, and compensate the excellent and devoted support staff, teachers and administrators and hope you make this one of your highest priorities.

Tonight, the Whitman Cluster will testify about two issues of particular concern to us regarding the Superintendent's FY '09 Proposed Operating Budget: first, increased staffing levels and second, the implications of an accelerated curriculum.

### **Increased Staffing Levels**

#### **Special Education Staffing**

The Whitman Cluster has testified over the past several years about the need for sufficient funding for special education staffing. As you know, proper levels of staffing, both for the general education population and the special education population, impact all students' educational experience.

#### **Staffing Model Used in Practice for Elementary School Inclusive Classrooms**

We have testified in the past about our concern with the failure of MCPS to include special education students in the head count for determining maximum class size in inclusive classes in elementary schools. We were extremely pleased to see that these concerns are recognized in this year's proposed operating budget. Specifically, we see the acknowledgment that general education class size is impacted, particularly in the core content subject areas, by not including students with disabilities in the enrollment count. Special education students who receive some part of their instruction in the general education setting, and general education students

should not be counted separately. Schools are working toward a more inclusive environment with co-teaching as a norm, rather than an exception. This can't happen without adequate general education staffing. We, therefore, enthusiastically support the proposed initiative to count special education students in general education enrollment at the elementary school level. We urge, however, that this initiative be closely monitored to ensure that inclusive classrooms are sufficiently staffed with general education teachers. We also hope that enough special educators are allocated so that the amount of special education support is based on the number of classrooms with special education students, not solely on the number of students.

### **Hours-Based Staffing at the Middle School Level**

In addition to the elementary school staffing model, the Operating Budget proposes to increase hours-based staffing at three additional middle schools. We support this proposal, however we urge that hours-based staffing be applied to **all** middle schools as soon as possible. Hours-based staffing increases the number of special education teachers and allows special education teachers in co-taught classes to focus on one or two content areas rather than several different subject areas. Teaching all of our students requires enough funds so that every child can succeed.

## **Increased Numbers of Guidance Counselors**

As you know, the Whitman Cluster consistently testifies for additional guidance counselors. We therefore applaud the Superintendent's efforts to increase the number of elementary school guidance counselors. Similarly, we were pleased to see that this budget retains the prior year's initiatives to increase the number of high school guidance counselors. Of course, while this increase brings the number of high school guidance counselors officially to one counselor for every 250 students, there is still a disconnect between what is proposed on paper and what happens in practice. Because of the significant additional administrative duties carried by the resource guidance counselor at each high school, that counselor does not carry a full case load. Thus, the other counselors end up serving significantly more than 250 students each. Although we are grateful for the additional positions in last year's budget, we continue to urge that there be more. Hire enough additional counselors so that, even when taking into account the reduced case load of the resource counselors, no one counselor in this county has a caseload that exceeds 250 students. We firmly believe that there is an intense need for more guidance counselors at the elementary, middle, **and** high school levels.

### **Initiative to Increase the Number of Elementary School Assistant Principals**

The Whitman Cluster supports the multi-year plan to put an assistant principal in every elementary school. Assistant principals in elementary schools enable the principals to focus on instructional leadership, have increased time with teachers and students and allows Principals to build relationships within the community. The proposed 10 more assistant principals would help advance this multi-year initiative.

### **Initiative to Increase the Number of Lunch Hour Aides.**

We were so pleased that for the first time MCPS included MCCPTA in developing the Operating Budget. Our parents of elementary school children have repeatedly emphasized their concern with the limited supervision they see during recess, and we believe that one of the results of MCCPTA's inclusion in the budget process is the initiative proposing additional lunch hour aides. As parents, we strongly support sufficient recess supervision, and the proposed 45:1 ratio of students to lunch hour aides is a good start. We hope that, in addition, new aides and current aides will receive the necessary training to deal with bullying issues and managing behavior while supervising our youngest children.

## **Accelerated Math Curriculum**

The Whitman Cluster embraces the need to proactively plan for the effect that an accelerated curriculum will have on our students and staff. At a recent meeting to explain the Math Pathways to parents in our cluster, the room literally overflowed with concerned parents. While we appreciate MCPS for coming to talk with our parents, there is still great angst over the fast pace at which students are learning math. As more students are taking accelerated math, we feel there needs to be sufficient funding to hire and train teachers to teach these classes in elementary, middle, and high school. Parents want to feel confident that from the beginning their children are getting a solid foundation in math that can be built on as they move along the “math path.”

In summary, we hope that you will continue to find ways to improve staffing levels so that we can (1) better educate all students in inclusive classrooms, (2) provide support for our students through guidance counselors and assistant principals, and (3) guarantee that our youngest children are appropriately supervised. In turn, we pledge to do all we can to ensure that there is sufficient funding to provide for the increased staffing levels.

We thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this evening.