

**TESTIMONY**  
**Before the Board of Education**  
**On the FY2009 Operating Budget**

January 16, 2008

Wootton High School Cluster

Wootton H.S.; Cabin John M.S.; Robert Frost M.S.; Cold Spring E.S.;  
Dufief E.S.; Fallsmead E.S.; Lakewood E.S.; Stone Mill E.S.; Travilah E.S.

Richard S. Edelman MCCPTA Delegate Robert Frost M.S.

1. Good evening. I am Richard Edelman, MCCPTA delegate and Cluster Representative for Robert Frost Middle School. I have a daughter who is in 7<sup>th</sup> grade at Frost and a son who graduated from Wootton High School who is about to graduate college. The Wootton Cluster appreciates the opportunity to be heard on the proposed FY '09 Operating Budget. This is a particularly difficult budget year when hard choices will have to be made in our County, a point I will address later in my testimony.

2. Parents in our Cluster are committed to a strong school system-- it is why they moved to this County, and why they moved to this Cluster. And parents in our Cluster find the quality of the school system to be a major reason justifying County and MCPS spending of the taxes they pay because they place a high priority on strong schools in our Cluster, and in our County. We have consistently taken the position that MCPS should be provided with adequate funding to meet the highest educational standards, and to challenge all students to reach the highest levels of performance they can--so under-performers and challenged students can reach necessary standards of performance, mid-level students can reach higher levels, and high level performers can maximize their abilities. In this regard we have consistently supported a level of funding that is sufficient to maintain the historic high standards of Montgomery County, as well as additional dedicated funding for special programs where necessary in schools with large numbers of under-performing students, as well as for individual students in generally high performing schools who also need extra help. We continue to support funding for MCPS sufficient to meet these goals, but recognize we face a difficult financial environment.

3. Our Cluster is supportive of the MCCPTA Operating Budget Compact; and we agree that the several items that MCCPTA has identified are priorities for additional spending and focus—staff development; parent outreach; the guidance program; transportation; gang prevention; remediation for students who need extra help; and safe, secure and healthy schools. We also support, in concept, the new initiatives proposed in the budget recommended by the Superintendent such as increases in elementary school principals, guidance counselors and lunch hour aides; expansion of middle school reform and magnet middle school consortiums and special education hours based staffing.

4. With respect to the Wootton Cluster itself, we have to note that Wootton High School remains seriously overcrowded and this creates need for additional operating funds for the school; ranging from teachers, to guidance counselors, to maintenance staff, to security staff. In this regard we appreciate the expansion of the College Institute which has alleviated some of the overcrowding. We know that MCPS is aware of this problem but we feel it is important to re-emphasize that the size of the student population at Wootton does have an impact on Operating Budget resources. Our Cluster parents also feel strongly that part of a good school system is having a healthy school environment. Our schools have had air quality problems and leaks, and older schools have increased costs for routine maintenance. We recognize that some of this involves CIP funding, but ongoing maintenance and remediation of environmental problems in our schools is also an operating budget issue. And generally, failure to address routine maintenance leads to only short term savings but larger costs in the long term, as well as lower productivity and morale when a place of study and work is not clean and healthy.

5. All of that said, we also recognize that this is a difficult budget year because County tax revenues are down State funding will lessen, and we have no chance of State funding for the Thornton geographical cost of education index. We also recognize that last year the County Executive opposed full funding of the MCPS request and that there was significant debate on the issue at the County Council. In this environment it may not be possible to obtain 100% funding of the proposed MCPS budget. If that is so, we urge the Board to do its best to maintain general high standards and continue focused spending where necessary, and not allow our schools to go

backward. In this environment it may be that some of the planned new initiatives will have to be less ambitious or deferred to next year, if necessary, increases may have to be limited to programs where federal funding has expired and local funds are necessary to continue them.

6. We want to commend MCPS on its use of zero-based budgeting concepts to make cuts where possible, and to focus on cuts that will not impact classroom instruction. In this regard we note that we frequently hear complaints that more cuts could be made in administration. If that is so, we encourage MCPS to do so. But at the same time we also hear more and more calls for better assessment of the utility of programs, better auditing, better curriculum design and better support for instruction. These are all administrative functions. At the MCCPTA Operating Budget forum it was mentioned that many administrative functions provide necessary support for classroom instruction. In that regard we suggest that MCPS provide more information about the various central office administrative functions and what they contribute so that there can be more useful discussion of this point.

7. In advocating for the funding for the schools, we think that MCPS and MCCPTA should continue to firmly make the points that the schools are an economic engine for the County, and that even residents who do not currently have school age children benefit substantially from the good school system. But we also urge the Board to have a “Plan B” that focuses on preserving what we have, and that MCPS not take steps to implement new programs that will be hard to undo, so that funding below 100% of the request will not create a scramble to comply with a lower funding level that might adversely impact existing programs.

8. We also note that there have been continuing concerns about the implementation of policy changes with little notice, limited opportunity for parental input and occasions of lack of responsiveness to parental objections. This has been especially so in the area of Special Education programs where parents have raised concerns about programmatic changes and staffing levels. We urge MCPS to do a better job in this area, in both disseminating information and in evaluating public responses

9. In conclusion, we want to thank the Board for the opportunity to express both our appreciation for what is working well, and our concerns about what needs to be done in the context of the budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

Thank you. I would be glad to answer any questions that you may have.