

**Blair Cluster Testimony on FY2010 Operating Budget  
Before the Board of Education  
January 21, 2009**

Testimony attached from the following schools:

**Clusterwide Testimony**

**Montgomery Blair High School**

**Eastern Middle School**

**Silver Spring International Middle School**

**Takoma Park Middle School**

**East Silver Spring Elementary School**

**Montgomery Knolls Elementary/Pinecrest Elementary School**

**New Hampshire Estates Elementary/Oakview Elementary School**

**Piney Branch Elementary School**

**Rolling Terrace Elementary School**

**Sligo Creek Elementary School**

**Takoma Park Elementary School**

**(Note, Sligo Creek ES and Silver Spring International have overlapping articulation between Blair and Northwood)**

East Silver Spring Elementary \* Montgomery Knolls Elementary \* New Hampshire Estates Elementary \*  
Oakview Elementary \* Piney Branch Elementary \* Pinecrest Elementary \* Rolling Terrace Elementary \*  
Sligo Creek Elementary \* Takoma Park Elementary  
Eastern Middle \* Silver Spring International Middle \* Takoma Park Middle  
Montgomery Blair High School



East Silver Spring Elementary \* Montgomery Knolls Elementary \* New Hampshire Estates Elementary \*  
Oakview Elementary \* Piney Branch Elementary \* Pinecrest Elementary \* Rolling Terrace Elementary \*  
Sligo Creek Elementary \* Takoma Park Elementary  
Eastern Middle \* Silver Spring International Middle \* Takoma Park Middle  
Montgomery Blair High School

## **Blair Cluster Testimony on FY2010 Operating Budget Before the Board of Education, January 21, 2009**

Buenas noches President Navarro and Members of the Board,

My name is Bladimiro Duenas. Susan Fleck and I are the cluster coordinators for MCPS' Blair Cluster, representing 13 schools, or 7 percent of our county's public school students.

To echo President Obama, we face real challenges and must make hard choices in these difficult times. The decline in public revenues creates a dilemma for our county's schools – our students have benefited greatly from the increased spending in past years. The achievement gap has been reduced and many innovative programs have improved test scores and provided more choice to all our students.

The downturn in the economy means that the school system faces hard choices. Before continuing, we want to thank MCPS staff and teachers who are foregoing the cost of living increase – a thank you seems so small in face of such a sacrifice, but it is all we have to offer. Gracias.

The Blair Cluster schools have reviewed the FY2010 Operating Budget and we feel it is important to be direct in our message. The Blair Cluster PTA leaders support and speak on behalf of all our children and youth in our cluster's schools. We are concerned that equal cuts across the board are not equitable; the reductions to the Operating Budget will have a more negative effect on the most at-risk students in our school system. Let me provide examples:

### **Literacy coaches**

MCPS is planning to cut 15 of these positions.

2 Literacy coaches at Blair identify all students who require literacy skill building in their reading, math, and science classes. These coaches are essential to prepare high school students for the obligatory HSA and high school graduation.

### **Academic intervention and alternative teachers**

MCPS is planning to cut 33.8 academic intervention teachers, keeping 110.9 positions; and to cut 6 alternative teaching positions.

The 1 academic intervention teacher at *Blair High School* works exclusively with at-risk students, helping to reduce by half the 15 percent of students who were in danger of failing the HSAs.

These teachers at *Eastern Middle School* work one-on-one to address specific gaps in achievement in reading and math and with behavior and attendance.

These teachers at *Silver Spring International Middle School* have allowed SSIMS to meet AYP the past two years.

East Silver Spring Elementary \* Montgomery Knolls Elementary \* New Hampshire Estates Elementary \*  
Oakview Elementary \* Piney Branch Elementary \* Pinecrest Elementary \* Rolling Terrace Elementary \*  
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### Reading specialists

Two of our cluster schools – both of them Title I – will dramatically feel the impact of the reduction of the .5 reading specialist position in small elementary schools and it is likely to affect their ability to meet AYP. These two schools also have a large share of students reading below grade level.

The K-2 *East Silver Spring Elementary School* has two times more students (38 percent) reading below target level than above the reading benchmark (20 percent).

The 3-5 *Oakview Elementary School* specialist takes on direct teaching and mentoring, teacher training, and other essential leadership roles with the staff.

Other schools, like *Takoma Park Middle School* and *Pinecrest Elementary School*, will be affected by cuts in reading specialists.

The Blair cluster maintains our conviction that **parent outreach staff** provides a vital link to parents who are unfamiliar with or know little about their child's school. We hope that there is a way to maintain the job duties of outreach despite the cuts in staffing. Students at SSIMS have benefited from parent involvement, the large share of Spanish speaking families at Rolling Terrace Elementary School depend on the school's outreach staff, and students at Takoma Park Elementary School, when it is relocated to Grosvenor for FY2010 while being remodeled, will require someone to keep parents connected to school.

We ask, too, that you recognize how important **middle school reform** has been for two of our three middle schools. *Silver Spring International Middle School*, with a 48 percent FARMS rate, has students who articulate to both Blair and Northwood. They have especially benefited from the reform. The Blair cluster supports SSIMS interest in opening their special whole-school IB program to out of boundary students.

We understand that increased enrollment this year and the coming year means that the schools need more teachers in the classroom, and we understand the squeeze in our budgets.

**We ask that MCPS and the Board work together to adjust the staffing formula to account for FARMS and ESOL rates, Title I and focus schools, and AYP achievement levels.** Without this consideration, neither excellence nor equity are likely to be achieved in these difficult times. Often, more vocal voices are raised to support excellence in choice programs. However, the parent leaders of Blair Cluster think it is essential to assure equity of opportunity and not just equal cuts.

The county budget is like a shrinking balloon - cuts must be made across the board. We ask only that cuts affect all our students equitably. Parents do not envy the hard work of the Board of Education and MCPS in balancing the budget. We do ask that you be vigilant in working with the state and federal officials to identify monies in the federal stimulus package to reinstate some of the funds to the highest priority programs that address student achievement.

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Montgomery Blair High School

Thank you for your leadership and wisdom in maintaining the interests of all students in this difficult budget environment. We have attached letters from 12 of the 13 Blair Cluster schools detailing the issues that are important to each school community. Please take a look.



***Montgomery Blair  
High School PTSA***  
**51 University Blvd. East  
Silver Spring, Md. 20901**

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January 21, 2009

We understand the difficult decisions that must be made in these uncertain economic times. We are particularly appreciative of the shared sacrifice of school and county employees. We appreciate the efforts made by the superintendent in proposing a budget which attempts to limit the impact of budget cuts on the delivery of curriculum to the students, which after all is the core responsibility of the school system. However, several of the cuts proposed by this budget would undermine our school's efforts to improve educational outcomes and reduce achievement gaps, and we urge you to reject them

**Cuts to programs that benefit at risk students**

The budget cuts affecting high schools focus primarily on programs that have been used to assist our at-risk student population. At Blair, we made AYP this past year, for the first time in a few years, due to the work of a dedicated team of teachers and staff who work directly with our struggling students. The proposed cuts would eliminate several positions that work directly with our at risk students. Continuing to make AYP will be very problematic without these dedicated professionals working to identify and assist those students who need more help.

These cuts are particularly troubling as students must now pass HSAs to earn a High School Diploma. We must address how we as a community will handle those students who are in danger of not graduating because they have failed HSAs, and are in serious danger of dropping out of school altogether.

At Blair, we started the year with 130 students out of a 12<sup>th</sup> grade class of 603 who were in danger of not graduating, because they did not have the requisite scores on their HSA's. Due to the hard work of an already overburdened staff, that number has been reduced to about 50 students who still must retake one or more HSAs or complete bridge projects in order to graduate. The ability of our staff to continue to ensure that students are able to graduate will be jeopardized by cutting the very staff positions dedicated to helping at-risk students throughout their high school careers.

- 1. Elimination of Literacy Coach Positions**—The proposed budget eliminates literacy coaches. At Blair, we currently have two literacy coaches who work with students in a variety of ways. They work with vertical articulation from middle school to high school to identify students who may have literacy problems. They assess every incoming Blair student through MAP-R to detect literacy issues. The literacy coaches have reading classes for identified students and work with other teachers to implement literacy skill building

practices into the regular course work, not just in English, but also in math and science classes as well. The elimination of these positions will make it nearly impossible for us to continue to identify and assist students with problems in reading and writing, and will make it more likely that even larger numbers of students will be unprepared to pass the requisite HSAs. It is absolutely critical that we be able to keep our literacy coaches.

2. **Reduction of Academic Intervention Teacher positions**—The proposed budget eliminates 33.8 academic intervention teachers, while keeping 110.9. Blair is currently assigned one academic intervention teacher who is used to work with students on improving reading skills. This is a teacher who works directly and exclusively with at-risk students. It is essential that we be able to retain our academic intervention teacher.
3. **Cuts to Para-educators and English Composition assistants**—Our para-educators work directly with struggling students to assist them in completing course requirements. English Composition assistants work with students on their writing skills which are essential to success not only in high school, but beyond. Again the primary beneficiaries of these programs are our at-risk students who need the extra support in order to succeed.
4. **Cuts to Alternative 1 teaching positions**—Alternative 1 is a well established program designed to deal with students who have serious problems in school. Alternative 1 teachers work with students on attendance issues, study habits, test-taking skills, everything that helps turn a struggling student into a successful student. Completion of an Alternative 1 program is a prerequisite to admission to an alternative school. Elimination of these positions would leave us with little resources to deal with our most problematic students.

### **Elimination of PSAT Support**

This year MCPS paid for all sophomores and juniors to take the PSAT. Part of the reasoning behind having these students take the test is that familiarity with the test should result in higher SAT scores, and, as we all know, one of the most important tools used to compare schools is the average SAT scores of its students. The proposed budget continues support for sophomores to take the PSAT, but eliminates support for juniors. However, junior year is the year that counts for the PSAT. If any year should be supported, it is the junior year. Sophomores, like freshmen, can take unofficial practice tests. While for most families in Montgomery County, the PSAT fee is not burdensome, for those students receiving Free and Reduced Meals the cost may be prohibitive. A school with a small percentage of FARMs students may be able to raise sufficient contributions to cover the cost. However, for schools with FARMs rates of 30% or higher, such a prospect is daunting. We ask that PSAT support be continued for students receiving Free and Reduced Meals, at least in the Junior year.

### **Reduction of Extra-curricular Allocation**

On its face, cuts to extra-curricular allocations do not seem to impact delivery of curriculum to the students. At Blair, there is a small wrinkle, however. In order for the Math, Science Magnet and Communication Arts Program students to meet all their curricular requirements, Blair has an 8 period day. While some teachers are not scheduled to begin their day until the second period of the day in order to cover the 8<sup>th</sup> period, Magnet teachers are at school for the full 8 period day. In lieu of paying them

their hourly rate for the extra time worked, magnet teachers receive a stipend under the extra-curricular allocation. This is a big savings to the county and preserves the integrity of the Magnet program. We need to ensure that cuts to the extra-curricular allocation do not impact our ability to make the magnet program work. In last year's operating budget, the Magnet program took a very large hit—magnet teachers lost their planning period, and as a result we have lost several fine teachers. The success of this program will be jeopardized by further cuts.

**Maintain CAP Program**

The Communications Arts Program (CAP) at Blair is a very successful and well regarded application program. Each year hundreds of students from across the Down County Consortium apply for the 75 available slots. Amazingly, it runs on very little support from MCPS. The director of the CAP must teach 3 classes each semester. The CAP director must run a program for 300 students, including handling the entire application process, with only one extra planning period. In contrast, the directors of most magnet programs do not teach any classes. The CAP has a part-time secretary and composition assistants. The additional cost to run this exceptional program is only \$30,000 per year. While the proposed budget does not specifically mention the CAP, we want to ensure that cuts to support staff do not serve to undermine the functioning of one of MCPS's more prestigious programs.

**Limit Support for Graduation Venues**

Finally, and most importantly to many Blair families, we are troubled by the limitation on support for graduation. As the largest high school in the county, every year we face turmoil about where we will graduate. We know DAR is too small for our large classes, we know the Equestrian Center is unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. MCPS knows the expected size of our graduating class years in advance, and every year it seems to come as a big shock that we don't have an acceptable, affordable place to graduate.

The proposed budget provides every school regardless of size a subsidy of \$5000 for graduation venue. It is patently unfair to give the same dollar amount to a school graduating 250 students as one graduating 700. Clearly the bigger school is going to need to rent a bigger venue at a higher cost.

We understand that this is an easy place to cut costs, as it impacts a minority of students who are leaving the school system. However, graduation is a culminating activity and should be a time to showcase our students' successes. At Blair, we have many students who are the first in their families to graduate from high school, making the high school commencement exercises a very big deal.

If our graduation venue subsidy is reduced, we must be given the leeway to explore other non-traditional venues, like a mega-church, that can accommodate us at an affordable cost. And, MCPS should establish timetables, well in advance of the summer before graduation, to schedule commencement exercises.

Respectfully submitted,  
Robert Gillette  
Blair PTSA Co-president

Pete Lafen  
Blair PTSA Co-president

Jeanne Philbin  
Blair Cluster Representative



January 18, 2009

**To:** Members of the Board of Education

**From:** Eastern Middle School PTSA

**Re: Proposed operating budget for FY 2009-10 places student achievement at risk**

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In the last several years, student performance at Eastern Middle School has significantly improved. For example, Eastern students' scores on Maryland Student Assessment tests have risen substantially in almost every area, and Eastern has made "Adequate Yearly Progress" as defined by the state of Maryland each of the last two years.

These achievements were possible because the Board of Education made important investments in staffing, support, training, and equipment. With our highly diverse student body that includes many recent immigrants and many families living in poverty, as well as a highly regarded communications and humanities magnet program, the students and families at Eastern have benefited tremendously from the school's ability to meet the needs of all of its students.

We were particularly appreciative that the Board embarked two years ago on Middle School Reform. For too long, the county's middle schools were the forgotten step-children of education reform within MCPS. Eastern became a participant in the Middle School Reform Initiative this year, and it is already proving helpful in continuing to improve student performance.

But Eastern's accomplishments now are at risk. The Eastern Middle School PTSA is deeply concerned about the size and nature of budget cuts contained in the superintendent's proposed operating budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

We recognize that the national recession is likely to reduce the funds available to the county for school operating expenses. We appreciate that the superintendent and his staff have worked hard to try to minimize the impact of budget cuts on classroom performance. And we accept that some level of budget reductions may be necessary in the short-term.

But some of these cuts, particularly reductions in school-based personnel, will make it harder for teachers to teach and for students to learn. **We urge you to reject the following cuts:**

- **Academic intervention teachers and alternative teachers.** At Eastern, these teachers fulfill a range of roles. For instance, they work directly with students one-on-one or in small groups to address specific gaps in achievement in reading and math. They also work to address issues of classroom behavior and attendance. The budget proposal would cut 20 of these positions from middle schools countywide, for a total projected savings of \$1.3 million. We are very concerned that these cuts will have a direct impact on classroom performance

- **Middle school reform.** A key goal of Middle School Reform is to ensure that middle school teachers benefit from the latest research on instructional techniques and are well-supported in their efforts to improve class performance. One way it does this is to provide a Staff Development Teacher in each participating school. The budget proposal would eliminate staff development teacher positions from Middle School Reform, reducing staffing by 11 positions overall, for total savings of \$687,000. Coming in addition to a reduction of \$240,000 in part-time salary funding that allows teachers to participate in trainings, this represents a significant step backward from the commitment to Middle School Reform.

Again, we appreciate the difficulty of these times and the inevitability of budget cuts. We particularly appreciate the sacrifice by teachers and staff of their cost-of-living pay increase, and we recognize that everyone in the school system will be doing more with less in the coming year. But the cuts described above are simply too big a step in the wrong direction, and we hope they can be restored.

Please contact any one of us if we can be of further assistance. Thank you for your attention.

Carla Smith and Calvin Smith, PTSA co-presidents (cardansmi@yahoo.com, csmith.ecp@gmail.com, or 301-592-1248 or 301-325-6617)

Nick Johnson, cluster representative (nickj4444a@yahoo.com or 301-754-1814)



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

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January 9, 2008

The Silver Spring International Middle School (SSI) PTSA recognizes that MCPS faces many stiff challenges with respect to the Operating Budget in the current economic climate. SSI appreciates MCPS's support of our school community and programs, and believes that with continued support our school 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 potential cuts to staffing and staffing formulae as well as potential 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.

**Please Help Us Address Special Challenges**

SSIMS' dedicated staff continues to strive to meet the educational needs of a diverse student body in a community with many special challenges. According to the 2007-2008 Schools at a Glance publication, **48%** of SSIMS students participate in the **FARMS** program, **10.2%** are in **ESOL**, and **13.6%** are categorized as Special Education (SPED) students. These percentages are among the highest in MCPS Middle Schools. While SSIMS is very pleased that it met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) last year, it remains a perpetual challenge to keep our scores up while providing rigorous instruction in all areas. We therefore believe that SSIMS can ill afford any reductions in staff, at least not in the near future, despite the current dramatic budget squeeze. We believe that full support for the SSIMS' current offerings (including the health and social services offered by Linkages to Learning, the school's programs for Learning and Academic Disabilities, and SSIMS' IB and Spanish/French Immersion programs) is critical to elevating the level of academic achievement and to restoring SSIMS' reputation for quality education.

**Please Adjust Staffing Formulae Based on Need**

We ask that you consider implementing a staffing allocation for grades 6 through 8 based on poverty rate so that the most highly-impacted schools such as Silver Spring International can provide equitable instruction to students at all levels of performance. We contend that equity is NOT treating everyone the same, but recognizing and addressing the huge gaps in preparedness for higher level instruction among students entering middle school. We also maintain that adjusting the staffing formula based on need would be a major step toward addressing the disparity in preparedness and achievement and would demonstrate to parents inside and outside the school a commitment to equitable instruction for all students. Specifically, we believe that the teachers of our county's more academically challenged students should be given the same teaching load as the teachers of some of our county's most gifted students. While middle school magnet teaching loads have been held to 100 students, teachers of non-magnet students teach to a much wider range of students yet can have 150 students in a 5-period schedule, or up to 190

students in schools with a 6 on 8 schedule. We believe that staffing formulae should work to help rather than hinder the students who need the most academic support.

We applaud the direction from the Central Office to provide rigorous, advanced instruction to all students. However, without staffing supports in place, what will insure that all students are successful? For example, at SSI, as in all MCPS middle schools, staffing for math classes is based on 32 students per teacher. Our students enrolled in double-block Math 6 who are at or below grade level are in classes that range from 15 to 30 students. Between 20% and 50% of these students have IEPs. Similar to the class size reductions implemented for grades K-2 in high-needs schools, staffing for Math in highly impacted schools like SSI should, in our opinion, be based on class sizes of 20 students to foster student success.

Our challenge at SSI is, as you know, compounded by the fact that, while we cannot recruit students from outside the boundary, we compete with the application and MSMC magnet schools for the most motivated students. High-performing immersion students are equally likely to gain admission to an application magnet or return to their home school, especially if it is Takoma Middle with its high concentration of GT students, as they are to attend SSI. Each high performing local or immersion student "lost" to another school translates to an increased educational load on our staff. Yet every school in the county, whether Pyle with a 1.5% FARMS rate or SSI with 48% FARMS, receives their staffing according to the same model.

In recent years we have been fortunate to receive additional staffing allocations from our community superintendent for Academic Intervention. Yet in this budget year we are told to expect and plan for less. In fact, our students and staff who don't happen to attend or teach in a less highly impacted area or magnet program deserve more than good fortune. Their higher educational load deserves to be addressed explicitly with a staffing model that is based on needs. Our basic question is whether it is acceptable that DCC ("red zone") middle school students who don't happen to be in a magnet program or school have such a different experience from those in the "green zone" in terms of opportunities for GT/honors students and enrichment for all students. Reaffirming your commitment to students in the most highly-impacted schools through staffing allocations, among other steps, would fully support the expansion of middle school reform, so a student in any DCC school in fact has the same instructional opportunities as at Pyle, Frost, or other schools with distinctly different demographics.

### **Please Consider Designating SSI a "Choice" School to Help Attract High-Performing Students**

As described above, SSI has a problem recruiting and retaining highly motivated students. In the past, we have suggested making SSI, with its whole-school IB program, a "choice" school to help stem the outflow of students to the magnet programs. We ask once again that you give serious consideration to this proposal.

### **Please Secure Additional Release Periods in Middle School Special Programs**

Having received authorization from the IBO in early 2007, SSI is in its third 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, SSI piloted the full-year Passion Project elective for 8<sup>th</sup> graders in 2007; in the five-year program this project is undertaken in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. This fall, nearly half of our 8<sup>th</sup>-grade 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 may also be the closest thing that SSIMS students have to the rigor and high expectations of the exclusive magnet programs only available at other schools. The Passion Project requires extensive coordination among all participants by the MYP coordinator. The coordinator also oversees annual reviews by the IBO to insure the program meets national and international standards and she conducts the expansion of the hallmark MYP design cycle

projects across departments and grades. The 1.0 MYP Coordinator position at Silver Spring International is therefore essential to the program's continued expansion and success. Over 60 teachers and staff act as student 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. We therefore ask that you please insure that added release periods for SSI's unique three-year MYP is part of the next Operating Budget.

**Please Do Not 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. A decrease of positions across the 12 elementary and middle schools with immersion programs would threaten to weaken instruction and increase the difficulty in attracting and keeping qualified staff. Presently, there is no immersion framework for MCPS, though one is due to be finalized and implemented starting this year. Therefore, a considerable amount of course preparation depends on individual teachers who must translate and prepare courses. 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 or release time.

**Please Support Vital 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.

**Please Resist One-Size-Fits-All Reductions in Stipends for After-School Activities**

The SSI PTSA's challenges raising funds from our families for enrichment programs go hand-in-hand with our challenges recruiting highly able students and our demographics. For example: Pyle had raised \$9,000 in parent donations in Sept.; Eastern raised \$4,000 through Nov.; SSI raised \$600 through early December, and not for lack of effort. Our PTSA works tirelessly to find outside funding for programs such as the annual Shakespeare Theatre residency we have been "lucky" to provide to students for the past four years, and which Pyle, as an example, funds through its parent-supported Educational Foundation. We are therefore concerned that an across-the-board reduction in stipends for after-school activities will disproportionately impact SSI and other highly-impacted schools, since our administration relies on staff and MCRD-funded courses to insure that enrichment opportunities are available FREE to all of our students. In all areas supporting instruction and enrichment, our students deserve no less than students whose families can and do afford more.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the SSI PTSA,

Joseph Lipten  
Blair Cluster Representative

Jeanne Atkinson  
Co-President  
Silver Spring International MS

Lisa Gabriel  
Co-President  
Silver Spring International MS



January 20, 2009

Montgomery County Board OF Education  
Carver Educational Services Center, Room 123  
850 Hungerford Drive  
Rockville, MD 20850

Board of Education Members:

The PTA of Takoma Park Middle School would like to thank you for your past support of our students and our school. We also appreciate the challenge that you face in devising a fair and effective operating budget in the face of difficult fiscal conditions. We have two priority items for your consideration: funding for academic intervention and maintaining a 5/8 schedule for teachers in the magnet program.

At Takoma Middle it is important that we maintain funding for Academic Intervention, which funded the double period math and English/reading classes. These have been instrumental in increasing the school's overall math and English test scores. Another priority is the 5/8 schedule for magnet teachers. This allows them to do collaborative planning with the non-magnet teachers. One of the great successes of Takoma Park Middle School has been the high level of integration between the magnet and non-magnet students.

Thank you for your consideration of these factors affecting the MCPS operating budget for 2009-2010.

Sean Tipton  
Takoma Park Middle School Cluster Representative

January 15, 2009

Montgomery County Board OF Education  
Carver Educational Services Center, Room 123  
850 Hungerford Drive  
Rockville, MD 20850

#### Board of Education Members

The proposed reduction in next year's MCPS operating budget of Staff Development and Reading Specialist Teachers to 0.5 FTE for elementary schools with less than 350 students will have an intense negative impact on ability of East Silver Spring Elementary School (ESS) to meet AYP. The current structure of the reduction would disproportionately impact the students of ESS through the combined effect of reduced service and expanded student population.

It was just announced in January, 2009 that East Silver Spring would expand in 2009-10 academic year to include 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. The expansion will raise enrollment by approximately 50 students, from 225 pre K through 2<sup>nd</sup> graders to 275 pre K through 3<sup>rd</sup> graders.

East Silver Spring Elementary School is a Title one school, with a FARM rate of 61.5%, an ESOL rate of 41.6%, and a mobility rate of 24.2%. Along with Oak View Elementary school, ESS is one of two Title 1 schools of this size to be effected by this reduction. **ESS is the only school expecting a 22% increase in student population to be affected by this reduction.**

East Silver Spring Elementary School 2<sup>nd</sup> graders have a particularly concerning profile of reading proficiency. According to the December, 2008 running record data:

- 38% of ESS 2<sup>nd</sup> graders (39 students) are reading below target level.
- 31% of ESS 2<sup>nd</sup> graders (31 students) are considered "at risk" of falling below reading target level.
- Only 10 ESS 2<sup>nd</sup> graders (20%) are reading at or above the MCPS reading benchmark.

AT ESS, the reading specialist provides direct, specific consultation to classroom teachers and support staff on how to improve reading instruction to individual students, and small groups; supports teachers in reading curriculum for all student groups; and provides direct teaching to students in need of reading support through individual and small group instruction.

At a time of great economic difficulty and need for reduced spending, it is understandable that a MCPS is looking for ways to equitably distribute the cuts and reductions, but equitable is not always equal. It is respectfully requested that the proposed reduction of the reading specialist at ESS and Oak View be reversed. The needs of the children at these schools are too great, and the alternate resources for the children too limited for this reduction to occur.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the ESSES PTA,

Deirdre O'Connor  
ESS PTA Cluster Representative

Catherine Langston  
PTA President



**Montgomery Knolls-Pine Crest PTA**  
**201 Woodmoor Drive**  
**Silver Spring, MD 20901**

January 21, 2009

To the Board of Education:

Montgomery Knolls and Pine Crest Elementary Schools would like to thank the Board for its continued support, particularly during this difficult budget year.

We are particularly appreciative of the support MCPS has shown for its Title I schools and for designating Pine Crest as a focus school. While we are disappointed that Pine Crest will no longer be considered a locally funded Title I school based on the FARMS rate of the local students, we appreciate the Board's continued recognition of the special challenges faced by schools serving lower-income families and its support for programs that serve all of our students. The MKPC PTA would also like to thank the Board for its continued support for some of the specific programs and initiatives that have been important in meeting the needs of our schools including the Montgomery Knolls unique PEP and Pre-Kindergarten programs, and Pine Crest's technology magnet program.

The ongoing support of the Board has been instrumental to our ability to meet the needs of our students and will be essential to our continued success. Our highest priority is to continue those programs that have had the greatest impact on student achievement. These include:

- Professional development training at the system and school based level which impacts student achievement and teacher/administrative quality, including providing sufficient release time to allow teachers to take part in training;
- Full-time art, music and PE teachers in all schools;
- Extended learning opportunities through ELO and the George B. Thomas Sr. Learning Academy (Saturday school);
- County-based cultural arts field trips by grade levels for all students; and
- Administrative support at the elementary level.

We urge MCPS to continue funding for all of these initiatives and programs.

Montgomery Knolls and Pine Crest would like to express concern regarding some of the proposed cuts in the operating budget, including the reduction in staff development and reading teachers for schools with less than 350 students. We encourage the Board to consider an exception for Title I schools facing these cuts. We are also concerned about the reduction in academic intervention teachers. We would also appreciate any efforts to ensure that after-school programs can continue as these are important supplements for our students, many of whom do not have access to any other enrichment activities outside of school.

Finally, the MKPC PTA appreciates the tremendous sacrifice that is being made by county teachers to forgo a cost-of-living increase over the next fiscal year and hopes that the Board will consider ways to retain staff during this difficult budget year, including by maintaining health insurance coverage for MCPS staff.

We would like to thank the Board for all of its hard work. We know that this is an extremely difficult budget year and we need to allocate money as efficiently as possible. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to provide input on the budget and would like to support the Board in advocating for additional funding from the state to ensure that programs and positions that are particularly important to at-risk students are preserved. We appreciate the strong support MCPS has shown for all of our programs and look forward to continuing to work together to make the best decisions for our students and our communities.

Kim Hutchins  
PTA President  
Montgomery Knolls-Pine Crest PTA



# New Hampshire Estates and Oak View Elementary Schools Parent Teacher Association



8720 Carroll Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20903

400 East Wayne Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20901

January 16, 2009

Carver Educational Services Center, Room 123  
850 Hungerford Drive  
Rockville, MD 20850

Board of Education Members:

The New Hampshire Estates and Oak View Elementary School PTA thank you for your ongoing, dedicated support of MCPS schools and all of our children. We recognize that the current economic condition makes crafting a sustainable budget more difficult than usual, and we acknowledge that every school will need to accept budget cutbacks. However, the proposed reduction in the FY2010 MCPS operating budget of Staff Development and Reading Specialist Teachers to 0.5 FTE for elementary schools with less than 350 students will have an intense negative impact on Oak View's ability to meet AYP and continue its work to close the achievement gap.

It is our opinion that school size should not be the only determinant of staff and resource allocation. The demographic mix, including FARM, ESOL and mobility rates, should also be considered. Equal is not always equitable. Oak View (OV) and East Silver Spring (ESS) are the only Title I schools to be affected by this reduction. According to the 2007-08 MCPS Schools at-a-glance section (most recent available on the MCPS website), Oak View's FARM rate is 73.1%, ESS is 61.5%. The ESOL percentage is 24.4% at OV and 41.6% at ESS. The mobility rate at OV is 28.1% and 24.2% at ESS. These numbers far exceed the other schools slated for the same proposed cuts. See table below for details.

### Comparison of the Twelve Smallest Elementary Schools in MCPS\*

School	# Enrolled	% SPED	% ESOL	% FARM	% FARM history	% Mobility
Carderock Springs	297	11.4	3.4	1.3	1.3	5.8
Cashell	302	12.6	13.2	16.6	21.2	7.9
Clarksburg	324	11.4	10.8	20.7	30.2	19.6
Damascus	287	14.6	10.5	16.4	20.9	9.9
East Silver Spring	226	11.5	<b>41.6</b>	<b>61.5</b>	<b>68.6</b>	<b>24.2</b>
Germantown	288	14.6	12.5	27.8	37.2	17.4
Meadow Hall	319	<b>17.9</b>	17.6	37.0	50.8	<b>24.2</b>
Monocacy	204	12.3	4.4	13.7	19.1	4.3
North Chevy Chase	316	8.9	5.7	9.5	12.3	4.6
Oak View	242	12.4	<b>24.4</b>	<b>73.1</b>	<b>80.6</b>	<b>28.1</b>
Seven Locks	259	8.9	8.1	1.9	2.7	6.0
Westover	267	<b>17.6</b>	10.1	18.0	25.8	10.7

\* 2007-2008 data, the most current publicly available information on the MCPS website

Reduction of the Reading Specialist at Oak View from 1.0 FTE to 0.5 FTE will have a devastating effect on children's literacy and the school's ability to meet AYP. The Reading Specialist serves 100% of the children at Oak View, this includes 60 ESOL students, and 30 special education students (15 with greater than 15 hours of service per week). Additionally, the Reading Specialist fulfills a myriad of other

leadership, testing supervision/coordination and strategic planning responsibilities at the school. See appendix 1 for a detailed list of the Oak View Reading Specialist's roles and responsibilities.

The Reading Specialist at a Title I school is essential to the school's efforts to meet AYP and close the achievement gap. No high impact school struggling to meet AYP should be expected to bear the double burden of reduction in both the Reading Specialist AND Staff Development positions. We respectfully request that you consider mitigating factors – FARM, ESOL and mobility rates – in addition to school size when reviewing the appropriateness of this cut in the upcoming MCPS Operational Budget.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Oak View and New Hampshire Estates Elementary School PTA,

Linda Krimm  
NHE/OV PTA Cluster Representative

Jennifer Hinrichs  
NHE/OV PTA President

## **Appendix 1 – Reading Specialist at Oak View – Roles and Responsibilities**

- Supervises new teachers – making sure they fully understand the reading curriculum, and assists them in planning each week for their reading block
- Meets bi-weekly with each grade level to help plan for instruction and review reading data
- Attends monthly KOC (Kids of Concern) meetings, making sure each student is being serviced properly according to their reading needs
- Monitors ESOL and Special Education students to make sure their reading needs are being met during the reading block and to identify appropriate interventions
- Analyzes all reading data and refreshes the Strategic Monitoring Tool after each new piece of reading data is gathered to determine in which color band each student falls (most likely proficient; probably proficient; struggling to be proficient; basic at this time)
- Places all struggling readers in a reading intervention group and determines what materials are most suitable
- Trains and monitors all intervention teachers
- Provides demonstration lessons for teachers upon request and if there is a specific teacher need that she's discovered
- Networks with other reading specialists to gain knowledge and strategies as to how Oak View can teach reading better – searching out best practices. She makes visits to schools.
- Organizes and administers the MAP-R three times per year and meets with grade level teams afterwards to go over results and decide how to adjust instruction for specific students
- Organizes the IRI assessment four times per year and meets with grade level teams afterwards to go over results and decide how to adjust reading instruction for specific students
- Manages all reading materials and makes suggestions to teachers as to which materials to use for specific lessons or to satisfy specific curricular objectives
- Serves as a pivotal member of the Leadership Team and is also a member of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) group which writes the plan and monitors the action plans
- Serves as a pivotal member of the Oak View Review Team which organizes six MSA review sessions throughout the year. She manages materials and assists with debriefing sessions with students – giving feedback to students and staff alike
- Manages the reading packet holiday/summer program to keep students reading and writing over Winter Break and Spring Break and during the summer. She organizes assemblies around this program and manages incentives for those who participate
- Serves as the co-testing coordinator
- Reviews all in-coming student records and tests new students to determine which reading group would best serve their needs
- Teaches twice weekly reading intervention groups (special education students)
- Reads with ESOL students one-to-one monthly
- Researches online support materials for teachers, or creates them if not found
- Assists in finding or creating quarterly BCRs (Brief Constructed Responses)
- Scores quarterly BCRs with grade level teams and plans for next steps
- Plans for and monitors school-wide initiatives with the core team (Principal, AP, Staff Developer)
- Chairs the Reading Committee and is responsible for producing evening activities/events for parents/students
- Directly services individual students as a result of KOC findings
- Distributes and collects textbooks, reference materials and classroom libraries at the beginning of the year and end
- Plans weekly reading block lessons for long-term substitutes
- Mentors an at-risk student
- Serves as one of the teachers-in-charge when principal and AP are out of the building together

January 16, 2009

Montgomery County Board of Education  
Carver Educational Services Center, Room 123  
850 Hungerford Drive  
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Board of Education Members:

The PTA of Piney Branch Elementary School would like to thank you for your past consideration of our school's needs, including the extraordinary effort to enable us to reopen the pool at our school. We also appreciate the challenge that you face in devising a fair and effective operating budget in the face of difficult fiscal conditions.

Piney Branch Elementary School (PBES) faces two unique circumstances that we ask you to consider as you deliberate over the operating budget. First, PBES has an unusually diverse student body in terms of ability. We have many students who require highly advanced instruction and many others who struggle with basics. PBES participates in the county's Gifted and Talented program. The school has a Free and Reduced Meal Services (FARMS) rate of 35.3%, an ESOL rate of 11.3%, and a Special Education rate of 9.9%. Intervention teachers handle both ends of the spectrum as the school strives to meet the needs of each student.

Second, PBES will face in the 2009-2010 school year a temporary drop of enrollment as East Silver Spring Elementary will retain its' 50+ rising 3<sup>rd</sup> graders instead of sending them to PBES as in the past. Under most expected outcomes of a pending boundary study, PBES expects to regain enrollment in the 2010-2011 school year. With this short-term anomaly in our enrollment numbers, PBES is concerned that it may lose critical staff capacity that enable our students to sustain achievement. While we may regain that capacity in future years, the lack of continuity may destabilize our school community. We seek creative ways to sustain critical functions for the one year that our enrollment may dip below the norm.

Thank you for your consideration of these factors affecting the MCPS operating budget for 2009-2010.

Kate Kelliher and Adrienne Tilton, Piney Branch ES PTA co-presidents  
Kevin Mills, Piney Branch ES Cluster representative

January 21, 2009

Dear Board of Education Members:

On behalf of the parents, students, and staff of the Rolling Terrace Elementary School community, I thank you for providing this forum for the public to express our views about the Montgomery County Public Schools operating budget and thank you for your hard work in service to the students of our outstanding school system.

I also want to thank the teachers and administrators of Rolling Terrace and throughout the school system for their decision to forego a pay increase in order to help close the budget gap we are experiencing. This is an extraordinary gesture and I know I speak for many parents when I say that we truly appreciate their sacrifice. In an ideal world, we would refuse to accept their offer and force them to keep the money. I know that there has been discussion of what to do with the \$24 million math error in our favor, and where this one-time injection of money could best be spent. I submit that, in my opinion, it should go directly to the teachers, to return the kind gesture they have extended to us, and to let them know that we appreciate them.

During these times of economic downturn for our country, State, and County, we are aware of the difficult decisions you have to make in allocating school resources and funds equitably for the 2009-2010 school budget cycles. At Rolling Terrace, we have a short list of items that we would ask you to consider as you make these decisions:

1. Continued funding for our Parent Community Coordinator. Our PCC is the most vital component in our proudly diverse community. The PCC imparts information about our school to parents, translates and interprets for Spanish-speaking families in our school, provides support to parents to complete forms for Special Education, Magnet Programs, FARMS, and other school forms as requested by parents. The PCC coordinates ESOL classes for parents, Spanish classes for English-speaking parents, coordinates nutrition classes and cooking classes. The PCC works closely with the school administration, teachers, the Judy Center and Linkages to Learning to refer parents/families to appropriate school and other services within the local and county community when parents are in need of help. The PCC makes home visits when it is necessary. The PCC assists the Parent Involvement Committee in implementing the school's system strategic plan of involving parents in the education of their children. Our PCC leads ongoing parent workshops, and keeps a dedicated family/Parent Resource Room open so our parents can meet, volunteer in the school and participate as much as possible in the education process of their children. In my opinion, you

will find no better value for your money at Rolling Terrace than in funding our Parent Community Coordinator's work.

2. Continue Funding Staff Development. As the ones who interact with our children on a day-to-day basis, teachers are the most important components of the school system. Everyone benefits from having teachers who are well prepared and well qualified to do the job. By investing in the professional development of our teachers, we are assured that they will have the most up-to-date information on the curriculum and teaching strategies to address the needs of our culturally diverse groups of children and their families.
3. Leave no child behind. If we are to pursue a policy of equity in education, we must continue to fund reading recovery programs that lessen the achievement gap between our most disadvantaged students and others. This is true at all levels, whether it means continuing support for high school students in advance of their assessment tests, or at schools like Rolling Terrace, where extra time devoted to reading for our children translates into stronger AYP progress.

On behalf of our PTA, Los Padres Latinos en Accion, the parents, teachers and staff of Rolling Terrace Elementary School, thank you so much for listening to our concerns. We are proud of our Montgomery County Public Schools and we believe that by pulling together even in this time of financial crisis, we can continue to deliver the best education in the country to our students.

Sincerely,

Tim Johnson  
PTA President, RTES





Takoma Park Elementary School Parent-Teacher Association  
7511 Holly Avenue, Takoma Park, Maryland 20912

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From: Takoma Park Elementary School PTA  
To: Board of Education  
RE: Comments on the Operating Budget  
Date: January 2009

The difficulty in crafting a budget that maintains the academic excellence for which Montgomery County Public Schools are well recognized while achieving the cost cutting necessitated by current economic conditions is appreciated. Our first priority must be that programs and initiatives are funded that help our students succeed. We support the budget in general but have a few concerns outlined below.

### **Increase in Kindergarten Class Size**

In light of the economy, we accept that raising class size from 15 to 17 is necessary but we can't afford to look here for any future cuts. This affects Takoma Park Elementary School (TPES) as well as all of the other elementary schools in our cluster. We also expect that the classes will return to 15 students when the economy recovers.

### **Loss of Academic Intervention Position at TPES**

Although we no longer qualify to keep our Academic intervention position, it would be challenging to meet the needs of our neediest students without that position. The impact is even greater as the class size for kindergarten increases to 17 and the teachers have less time for individual students. In addition, TPES will be in a remote holding school for the 2009-2010 academic year and we will have increased challenges for interacting with and engaging parents from this distance. If we can't keep the entire position, keeping 1/2 of it would be an acceptable compromise.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the TPES PTA,

Anne Busse  
TPES Blair Cluster Representative

Nina Garfield and Shmuel Shoham  
TPES PTA Co-Presidents