

# Northwest Cluster

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Northwest High School

Kingsview Middle School

Lakelands Park Middle School (shared)

Roberto Clemente Middle School (shared)

Clopper Mill Elementary School

Darnestown Elementary School

Diamond Elementary School

Germantown Elementary School

Great Seneca Creek Elementary School

Ronald McNair Elementary School

Spark M. Matsunaga Elementary School

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## Operating Budget Testimony

### to the Board of Education

January 14, 2009

Good Evening Dr. Weast, President Brandman, and Board Members. I'm Susan Burkinshaw, one of the Northwest Cluster Co-Coordinator.

Understanding that as a community we continue to face a very tight fiscal climate, our number one request is that you prioritize your decisions based on our children's safety, health and educational well-being in their learning environments. As fellow taxpayers, we would also request that you continue to consider and incorporate environmentally and fiscally responsible solutions that will yield future cost-savings to our county and will also minimize our shared environmental footprint.

Although we do not have any major problems in our cluster, we want you to be aware of several areas of concern: pedestrian safety continues to be a concern across our cluster, and staffing in some of our schools is very slim, resulting in large class sizes and high counselor to student ratios.

McNair Elementary School, Lakelands Park MS, and Kingsview MS continue to experience traffic and pedestrian safety concerns. Ronald McNair has two crossing guards at distant intersections from the school, but they have concerns over the volume of traffic and the pedestrian traffic immediately adjacent to the school's car entrance. We have requested MCPD come to evaluate the situation, but so far their concerns have not been directly addressed.

We testified last year about Lakelands Park MS and the lack of traffic controls at the intersection in front of the school. With over 50% of this school's population

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as walkers, this continues to be a problem with the school staff trying to get help, and with the County and City of Gaithersburg neither accepting responsibility for, nor addressing the problem. Fortunately, no child has been injured as of yet at either of these schools, although there have been many close calls.

Kingsview Middle School has concerns about the walkability of the surrounding areas. Although construction is underway to improve some walking access to the school, including sidewalks in front of the new fire station, there are still many neighborhoods that don't have safe walking access, but the children arrive to and depart from school on foot nonetheless.

Improving pedestrian safety and walkability across the county should be a priority to increase safety, promote exercise, and ultimately reduce transportation costs.

Regarding large class size, the current second grade at Darnestown Elementary has 58 students, including several with special needs. In kindergarten, these children were divided into 3 classrooms, but for first and second grades, staffing has only allowed for 2 classroom teachers.

Although the creative use of a reading specialist allows these children to break into 3 classes for the morning, there are 29 children in each of the two afternoon math classes.

Although there is a paraeducator in the classrooms, this person is necessarily assigned to work with the special needs children individually, while the classroom teacher must effectively teach the remaining 27 students. As dictated by the curriculum, smaller 'break out' groups must also meet with the teacher during that time, the remaining children are left with no instructional support. Parent volunteers are then called upon to work as paraeducators to fill the instructional void.

We have been advised that a request for an additional classroom teacher for these children was made last year by the Darnestown ES Principal, Mrs. Laura Colgary, when it was clear that enrollment at this grade level would continue to be high, but that request was apparently denied.

While the teachers at Darnestown ES are highly capable, experienced professionals, coping to the best of their admirable abilities, it is unfair to put these kinds of demands on them and the students. Enrollment at Darnestown ES is very stable year to year, and is unlikely to change significantly for third grade. The stress from this environment is negatively impacting not only the staff, but also students and parents--increased staffing may be the only appropriate remedy.

A similar problem exists at Matsunaga/Longview, where students are not receiving the same counseling program that other children in the county are

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experiencing. With 960 Matsunaga students and 52 Longview students on site, Matsunaga has only a single counselor to support all of those children. If there would be any way to rectify that situation, they would be most appreciative.

On a lighter note, as you know, the Northwest Cluster is fortunate to include Great Seneca Creek Elementary, the first and only LEED Gold certified school in Maryland. Here we are experiencing not only the environmental benefits of a facility built with the principles of a minimizing the building's environmental impact, but also the longer term operating cost savings of being in a facility that maximizes its resource utilization. As such, our Cluster encourages you to use Great Seneca Creek ES as a model for all schools as environmentally renewable solutions are implemented across the county.

For example, Great Seneca Creek Elementary School has seen a tremendous cost savings with its "green" design—it currently uses the least energy of any building owned by MCPS, using about ½ the energy per square foot per year compared to the average MCPS facility. GSCES costs about 18% less to operate per year than an average non-green school, with a combined water and energy savings of about \$27,000 annually over a comparably sized facility.

We encourage you to continue to evaluate this budget closely to ensure that each child in this county is safe in and around their schools, and that as a county school system we continue to promote and execute solutions with long-term cost-efficiencies and minimal environmental impact. Like you, we expect that all children in our county schools should experience equivalent learning atmospheres.

*Respectfully submitted by:  
Susan Burkinshaw and Bob Murphy, 2007-8 Northwest Cluster Co-Coordinator*