

**Testimony of the Richard Montgomery High School Cluster  
on the Superintendent's Recommended FY 2010 Operating Budget  
January 14, 2009**

Good evening, President Brandman and Members of the Board. My name is Lori Merrill, and along with Kate Savage, I serve as a Cluster Coordinator for the Richard Montgomery High School Cluster.

The Richard Montgomery cluster parents and staff recognize, as you do, that this proposed budget reflects the realities of the serious fiscal challenge confronting our schools, the County, the State, and our Nation. We genuinely appreciate the efforts of MCPS teachers, administrators and support staff, working together with the Superintendent, the Board, to seek the savings and make the sacrifices that are required to contain costs while still providing a quality educational experience for our students.

Like the other speakers here tonight, the Richard Montgomery cluster supports the Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations' FY 2010 Operating Budget Compact, as well as the Resolution on Operating Budget Priorities. We will add our voices to the MCCPTA's advocacy at the county and state level to help MCPS receive the maximum amount of funding possible.

In this tight fiscal period, the proposed FY 2010 Operating Budget represents a difficult reality. However, as an advocate for Beall, College Gardens, Ritchie Park and Twinbrook Elementary, Julius West Middle and Richard Montgomery High Schools, my job is to share with you the unmet needs that will continue and even increase under this proposed Operating Budget.

Our cluster is growing in size, and reductions in the Operating Budget means continue crunch in coverages for lunchroom and recess aides for elementary school students in the cluster. Ritchie Park has highlighted this as a particular need for them in the coming year.

Reduced Operating Budget eventually result in increased class sizes, which are already contemplated in the Superintendent's proposed budget. The increase in class size from 15 to 17 in kindergarten for the focus schools is actually a reality at many of the focus schools anyway. For example at Twinbrook Elementary school, where 3 of the 5 kindergarten classes are already at 18 students and a fourth is at 17 students under the policy of the class size limit of 15. So in a cluster with 2 focus schools and increasing enrollment, does the limit of 17 really mean a reality of class sizes of 21 next year in focus school kindergartens? If the schools are already at the new level of 17 students per class, where are the savings without further increases? Sustaining the strides made at the elementary level will be a challenge under these circumstances.

The proposed reductions try to spread out the savings across MCPS departments and positions, but Assistant Principals, counselors, literacy and media assistants, lunchroom aides and paraeducators, and other support services are not amenities; they are crucial investments in a vital effort to close the achievement gap among diverse student populations.

The broad elimination of release periods, support services, and teacher positions will undoubtedly impact the integrity of nationally-recognized special programs at schools like Richard Montgomery High School and College Gardens Elementary School. These programs, and the superior teachers who staff them, consistently demonstrate their strong value to our community, and are a key reason for the success and high national ranking of Montgomery County's schools. Keeping this level of excellence will be a challenge as support for these programs erodes in tight budget realities.

The lack of adequate funding for maintenance means that the \$40-50 million backlog of maintenance projects will only worsen, potentially impacting the safety and health of our students and teachers. In addition, continued support for the safe and secure schools initiative is vital, so that schools can obtain security staff, for both on-site school security and pedestrian safety, because we are seeing no improvement in these areas.

We need your sage understanding of and response to the pressing educational needs with which we are now confronted. We ask you to ask questions of Dr. Weast and staff and understand the MCPS Operating budget to assess if the proposal before you is the best way forward for our schools. The reality is hard and we are looking to you at this pivotal moment to make sound choices for our schools, which are an incredible asset for this County, and for the children which are our future.

Thank you for your time this evening, your dedication to the children of our community, and your ongoing support for the Richard Montgomery cluster.