Seneca Valley Cluster

Seneca Valley High School

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School
Roberto Clemente Middle School

Lake Seneca Elementary School

S. Christa McAuliffe Elementary School
Dr. Sally K. Ride Elementary School
Waters Landing Elementary School

Comments on

The Superintendent's Recommended FY 2010 Operating Budget

Prepared by: Kevin David, Seneca Valley Cluster Coordinator

January 14, 2009

Good evening President Brandman and members of the Board. My name is Kevin David and I am one of the Seneca Valley Cluster Coordinators.

I would like to begin by expressing our thanks to the county for a few things. First, a public thank you to the teachers union for returning to the bargaining table and adjusting their agreement to reflect everyone's concern for the current economic condition. Secondly, thank you very much for the quite readable "Operating Budget in Brief" which is a far cry from what we had to deal with in the past, and is a very big step in the right direction toward more transparency. Lastly, thank you Dr. Weast for providing MCPS with a very affordable, but rather optimistic, budget.

We believe that the economic downturn of the last quarter of 2008 has been severe and if we combine that with the rather chilly reception we have been getting from Annapolis as of late, Montgomery County's revenues are going to be much smaller than anticipated. Thus, if these revenues are smaller, it means MCPS will have to make further cuts than have already been suggested.

So the question is: Where do we hold the line?

It has taken MCPS ten years to implement class size reduction around the county and that effort could be wiped out in less then two years if the budget is met by increasing class size. Our cluster has higher than the county average FARMS rates and each elementary school is a focus school. We all know that increased class size will affect the FARMS impacted schools the most.

MCPS has budgeted to continue with the comprehensive middle school reform and we applaud you for this, but Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School is not one of the schools budgeted this year. This is a program that we have been asking for and waiting patiently for. Therefore, we would like to see it stay on track. The reduction of 11 teacher support positions in the current middle school reform schools will be a major setback to both the students and the staff. To remove anymore resources from this initiative would be detrimental to the future students of Martin Luther King Jr. and to the reform as a whole.

The reduction of 23% of our academic intervention teachers will have a devastating effect on our struggling and at risk students. If MCPS wants to stay 10 percentage points ahead of the state wide averages and 15 percentage points ahead of the nationwide averages for AP testing, we cannot afford any more reductions in this area.

The reduction of the 15 literacy coach positions at the high school level strips away another area of support for the struggling student. This is an important position at Seneca Valley High School and one that will be sorely missed. One just has to look at our AP testing scores to see that Seneca Valley students cannot afford to lose anymore academic support positions.

The reduction of 25% of our alternative teachers will have a direct impact on the amount of and types of emotional, behavioral and social supports that will be provided to our students. This could lead to some secondary students in the Seneca Valley Cluster not receiving the levels of support they need since the remaining 47 alternative teachers will be spread out among the county's 60 plus secondary schools.

The Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs is extremely important to all of our schools and quite often goes unnoticed. The services provided by this office are very important to many at risk students and most important to our ESOL population. We understand that this office is doing everything it can to meet current budgeted staffing ratios for all ESOL classes. Thus before additional resources are removed from this office we would like to know if a reallocation of these existing ESOL resources could be done to supplement the specific needs of a school. For example, a school that has many Spanish speaking volunteers to do translations might be better served with a MCPS supplied Vietnamese translator for meetings or publications.

Nothing in this budget pains us more than to see the reduction in building services staff. As a cluster we are currently enjoying wonderful response from the Division of School Plant Operations and we would like to see this continue. However with many of our schools getting up in age now would be a great time to evaluate all the major systems in each school and to create a preventive maintenance schedule so that we may be able to head off more costly repairs in the future.

Thank You