

FY 2010 Operating Budget Testimony
Whitman Cluster
January 21, 2009

Good evening, President Brandman, Vice President O'Neill, Distinguished Members of the Board of Education and Dr. Weast. My name is Deborah Goldman and with me tonight is my Whitman Cluster Co-Coordinator, Keith Parsky.

No one needs to remind you that our community and nation are confronting an extremely difficult fiscal environment. We are mindful and supportive of the steps our Superintendent took when preparing a responsible 2010 Operating Budget. We are also extremely grateful to MCPS staff and teachers who sacrificed and generously agreed to forego their cost-of-living wage adjustments slated for next year, so that our children would not be adversely affected in the classroom by these grim economic times. The Whitman Cluster's highest priority is to maintain class size at current levels. We therefore, with one caveat about which Carderock Springs' PTA President Sara Bhatia will testify this evening,¹ support the Superintendent's proposed Operating Budget. We believe the proposed Operating Budget mostly reflects that

¹ The Superintendent proposes cutting a .5 reading specialist and a .5 staff development position to the ten smallest elementary schools, including Carderock Springs Elementary School. This targeting of small schools is arbitrary; as the positions cut are unrelated to the size of the school. Moreover, the cuts are extremely detrimental to the ability of children at those schools to learn. (See Testimony of Sara Bhatia, PTA President, Carderock Springs Elementary School).

priority, and hope that if further cuts need to be made that all other possibilities be considered before class size increases.

As you know, in the past, the Whitman Cluster has strongly advocated for increasing the number of guidance counselors in the schools. We wish we could stand here tonight and ask you to fund more guidance counselors, because we truly believe that as our children face life's ever increasing complexities, guidance counselors are more urgently needed. Last year, we also testified in support of sufficient funding for special education staffing. Indeed, we continue to believe that proper levels of staffing for both the general and special education population impacts all of our students' educational experience. We wish we could stand here tonight and also ask for increased funding for hours-based staffing.

We also testified in support of the Assistant Principal Initiative and lunch/recess aides increases. We still believe that Assistant Principals in Elementary Schools provide needed support to those schools. And we still firmly believe that there should be increased supervision of our youngest children at recess. We wish we could stand here tonight and ask that you also find a way to place an Assistant Principal in every Elementary School, and that you increase funding for more recess aides.

Overall, the clear thrust of our testimony in previous years was aimed at ways we could improve staffing levels in many areas because increased staffing allows our children to learn more effectively in a safer, more positive environment. Given the dire state of the budget, however, we are not standing here tonight asking that you

grant our wishes for additional funding of any of these important initiatives for which we testified in past years.

Instead of wishing away the grim realities of today's economic situation, we will continue working with you and will support you in holding the line on the most basic and important staffing level - the current student-teacher ratio. That ratio is the most important factor for helping our children to learn effectively. We, therefore, do stand here tonight, simply asking you to try and find a way to maintain the Whitman Cluster's top staffing priority - the current level of class-size.

At the Operating Budget Forum on January 5th, we heard many of you express your support for maintaining class size, and we know that you will work hard to see that class size is not adversely affected by the Budget. We also heard your request that we focus on Annapolis, so that we receive our fair share of the State's Budget.

The Whitman Cluster already organized a letter and email campaign to lobby and inform our Governor about Montgomery County's concerns.² We will continue to work with MCCPTA and our leaders to remind our legislators that, although we wish it wasn't so, Montgomery County has also been hard hit by this economic downturn and cannot be taken for granted or neglected.

Thank you and good evening.

² See Attachment A, Example of letter sent to Governor O'Malley.