

TESTIMONY
Before the Board of Education
On the FY2010 Operating Budget

January 21, 2008

Wootton High School Cluster

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Richard S. Edelman, Co-Cluster Coordinator

1. Good evening. I am Richard Edelman, a Co-Cluster Coordinator for the Wootton Cluster. The Wootton Cluster appreciates the opportunity to be heard on the proposed FY 2010 Operating Budget. We recognize that the Board, MCPS and everyone involved in the school system faces very difficult choices in the upcoming school year as we attempt to maintain the quality of our schools in an extremely challenging fiscal environment.

2. At the outset we want to acknowledge, and express our appreciation for, the decisions of the organizations of MCPS employees to defer scheduled pay increases. That is a hard thing to do at any time, but it is especially hard in this economy; and it shows the commitment of MCPS employees and their organizations to maintaining high quality public schools in our County. The deferrals constitute the difference between troubling cutbacks and cutbacks that would have serious adverse impacts on students. So we commend MCPS and the employees for what they have done.

3. With respect to the Superintendent's proposed budget and the choices made, our PTAs spent considerable time discussing priorities. Ultimately, we think that while some of the choices made are unfortunate, they are reasonably appropriate in this environment.

4. Consistent with MCCPTA, parents in our Cluster place a high value on avoiding increases in average class sizes, and this proposed budget appears to generally prevent that.

Nonetheless, under the proposed budget, there will be in-classroom impacts in the form of reductions in in-school support personnel such as instructors and aides for reading assistance programs, special education, alternative education, and other programs. Additionally, we understand that department heads have been told to reduce their time in that function and to take on more instructional duties; and that training has been decreased. These are cuts we do not want to see, but given the range of options, these reductions seem to represent the “less-worse” options. But these cuts will have adverse consequences and should not be minimized; any further cuts will be truly harmful and hopefully can be avoided. On the other hand, if MCPS is fortunate in State and Federal funding, the Wootton Cluster requests that the in-classroom support positions be restored, that department heads be returned to their prior duties and that reductions in training be reversed.

5. Like the Board, MCPS and the employee groups, we hope that the currently proposed changes will be sufficient to hold the line. Remarks of County legislators that the proposed budget appears “fundable” are encouraging, but we also know that many economic events that once seemed impossible have occurred this year. We have also heard from Board members that if additional cuts are necessary, it is likely that the Board will not be able to protect class sizes; and we do not believe that further cuts in in-school supports can be made without serious harm to the student populations involved. So we urge MCPS and the Board to get back to the PTAs with respect to priorities if the situation worsens. In that regard, we note that many parents feel that too much time and too many resources are spent on multiple tests. We feel that this is an unproductive use of resources; and if cuts are to be made anywhere, this is a prime place to cut.

6. We also note that this year MCPS made a change with regard to fees charged to students. Many parents have felt burdened by, or put-upon by, the number of fees for educational materials and supplies, and have sought to have the number of fees reduced. On the other hand, parents are aware that the fees have been used to help support important programs and studies. Although MCPS has said that some of these costs will be paid-for from money no longer needed for text books, not all of the fees will be replaced, and some programs and classes will suffer. We believe that the policy and funding related to items on which fees were charged needs refinement and that programs and classes that were paid-for by fees should not be lost because MCPS has eliminated fees but has not replaced the funding for those programs and classes.

7. We also note that Wootton High School remains seriously overcrowded and this creates need for additional operating funds for the school; ranging from teachers, to guidance counselors, to maintenance staff, to security staff. We know that MCPS is aware of this problem and has provided support that allows the high school to serve its students well, despite the high numbers of students. We urge the Board to continue to provide that support, since Wootton cannot continue to serve its students well in the absence of funding recognition of the impact the large student population has on the school. Also, our schools have had air quality problems and leaks, and older schools have increased costs for routine maintenance; good education cannot be provided in bad buildings. So we hope that the Board will ensure that the budget provides the funding necessary for healthy and safe physical school environments.

8. Although the remarks of County legislators seem positive, we recognize that there is advocacy work to be done at the County level and at the State level. We feel that the Superintendent has put forward a responsible budget for these times, and we in the Wootton Cluster will do our part to support it. We will ask parents to contact State and County legislators to urge them to provide necessary funding for high quality education. Parents in our Cluster have

always supported a strong school system-- it is why they moved to this County, and why they moved to this Cluster; and they find it a major reason justifying County and MCPS spending of the taxes they pay. We will urge them to individually convey that support to our elected officials. And we urge MCPS in its advocacy to make clear that the level of funding requested is not only the right thing to do for students, it is the right thing to do for the County, because our excellent public schools do not only benefit students, they are an economic engine for the whole County. Among other things, the schools support property values for all homeowners in the County and they attract good employers to the County. Everyone in the County has a stake in the ability of MCPS to continue to provide an appropriate education to all students who live here; to allow all students to learn as much as they can, and to maximize their levels of performance.

Thank you. I would be glad to answer any questions that you may have.