

**Testimony to the County Council
on the Operating Budget
April 9, 2008
by Laurie Halverson
MCCPTA Winston-Churchill Cluster Coordinator**

Hi. I'm Laurie Halverson, MCCPTA Cluster Coordinator for the schools that feed into Churchill High School. I represent over 6,000 parents, teachers and students in Roger Berliner's 1st district.

We have three priorities of concern that relate to your role as decision makers of the county's Operating Budget in these tough economic times:

Goals are in place to work toward reaching each child's fullest potential and we need your help to get there. At Churchill High School, the National Blue Ribbon Award demonstrates that our cluster, with its diversity, is closing the gap. It takes a combination of things to meet the needs of each child in elementary schools to get to this point— *committed teachers who without a doubt are our most revered asset*, reduced class sizes, reading initiative, paraeducators, strong leadership, and suitable curriculums. There is still progress to be made, especially in our middle schools. We cannot succeed without thousands of hours of volunteer help during class time and after school programs, such as the *Ruth Rales Program* which includes retired teachers. We want to emphasize to you how important it is that we keep this momentum moving forward. Any steps backward, such as a loss of even one position at a school would create a ripple affect that negatively impacts an entire school. So, please do what you can to keep each of these pivotal cogs in the wheel in place.

Penny Wise Pound Foolish Maintenance Plan needs to change- Ten cluster coordinators testified to the Board of Ed in January that our schools and portables have maintenance issues. Routine maintenance would save the county money over time and would protect our children from serious health issues associated with poor ventilation. You may not hear so much about maintenance from your districts because most parents assume that routine maintenance is already being done. The lack of maintenance is not something you would immediately recognize. But, when a child or teacher becomes ill after conditions become deplorable, you have seen parents come out in droves. Thus it is our responsibility as leaders to nudge this issue to the forefront. Perhaps there are standards you can put in place such as "LEED for Existing Buildings" to compliment the county's LEED requirements for new buildings. At a minimum we ask your leadership to stress more concern with MCPS of the overall health and safety of our children.

Crossing guards - We are concerned that there could be cuts or hiring freezes in the MCPD and we need more not fewer crossing guards, as shown by our recent MCCPTA resolution. Money for crossing guards comes from MCPD, although they work with the MCPS Department of Transportation to determine the need and allocate crossing guards. However, the police department and MCPS won't say there is additional need because the money isn't there, yet the County Council can't justify giving money when they hear from the MCPD that the need is not there. So, we are stuck with no new crossing guards, yet, for

example, 472 vehicles were tallied going through a 4-way- stop intersection at Cabin John MS during the 25 minutes before school. There are often near misses there, and one child was bumped by a car while crossing this year. I have attached my letter to the BOE and a response from Larry Bowers for you.

One more thing-we want to go on record as opposing the decision of MCPS to eliminate parent, student and teacher surveys this year. Thanks for your service to our county and for listening!