

**Written Testimony
Of Steve Augustino
On Behalf of the
Gaithersburg Cluster**

**Montgomery County Council
April 7, 2008**

Good evening. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Gaithersburg cluster concerning the County Executive's Recommended Fiscal Year 2009 Operating Budget. These are difficult economic times for the county, and we recognize that this budget is more limited than we would prefer. We urge the Council to look closely at ways to close the projected shortfalls in order to fund the school budget. The budget before you contains several welcome initiatives to promote student achievement and further parental involvement in education.

First and foremost, we support the expansion of the Middle School Reform strategy to an additional ten schools. One of the proposed schools is in our cluster, and we are eagerly anticipating the additional resource staffing and technology improvements the program provides. It is so important that we keep our students engaged and learning during their middle school years. We have heard positive responses to the Middle School Reform implementation so far and we support the proposed expansion of the program. On a related note, we would like to see the expansion of programs for students in accelerated learning programs in the middle schools to ensure that these students do not fall back in the gains they make at the elementary school level. We also would like to see a greater effort to promote middle school music programs, which are essential components of a well-rounded education.

Second, we support the proposals for new parent-community outreach positions, for ten additional elementary school assistant principals and for an increase in school counselors at the elementary school level. The Gaithersburg cluster schools are among the most racially and ethnically balanced schools in the county. This diversity is to be celebrated, but it comes with an increased need for outreach to our many populations within the community. We welcome the additional involvement that skilled outreach coordinators and the additional administrative staff can produce.

Third, we are grateful to see that the proposed budget continues the focus school efforts that have been successful in promoting education to our most impoverished students. We believe the lower class sizes and additional staffing are contributing toward a more positive experience for all students in the focus schools. If anything, more should be done to target achievement programs to these communities.

We have two areas of concern with the County Executive's proposal. First, we are concerned that the budget does not provide adequate resources to meet the maintenance needs of our schools. The unfortunate trend in MCPS' capital improvement program is

that projects and costs are increasing faster than our ability or willingness to keep the projects on schedule. As you have heard me testify several times, Gaithersburg High School has been waiting for modernization for at least 15 years and our students are suffering because of the inadequate facilities that the old GHS building provides. We cannot bear the burden of any additional delay in constructing GHS' new building – it is deplorable that MCPS has allowed GHS to deteriorate to the state that it already is in. Unfortunately, the operating budget will not provide funds to fulfill interim needs of Gaithersburg High nor will it provide funds to keep other facilities from deteriorating while they await modernization under the lengthy schedules established by the current capital improvement schedules. We would like to see a real increase in maintenance resources and, most importantly, introduction of rational programs for preventative maintenance across all our schools.

Finally, I would like to express our support for the expansion of the Educational Facilities Officer (EFO) program. This program assigns Montgomery County police officers to our schools in a “community policing” model. Presently, the program provides approximately one police officer per cluster, with most EFOs primarily supporting the high school in the cluster. I recognize that this program is funded through the county police budget, not MCPS' budget, but it provides a real benefit to MCPS' mission. The EFO program has been effective in promoting school safety and positive community relations at the high school level. The practical realities of the program limit the ability of EFOs to provide similar support to our middle school communities, however. We would like to see the allocation of additional police officers to the EFO program to provide support in those middle schools most in need.

Thank you.