

**Spoken Testimony of the Richard Montgomery High School Cluster  
on the County Executive's Recommended FY 2009 Operating Budget  
April 9, 2008**

Good evening, President Knapp and Members of the Council. My name is Lori Merrill, and I am one of the MCCPTA Cluster Coordinators for the Richard Montgomery High School Cluster.

Like many other organizations, the Richard Montgomery cluster has grave concerns with the County Executive's proposed 2009 Operating Budget, which cuts \$51 million from a Board of Education budget request that was already inadequate to meet the needs of the students and teachers in the County's schools. Like other speakers here tonight, our cluster energetically supports the MCCPTAs' Operating Budget Compact and Resolution in support of more crossing guards and Educational Facilities Officers.

With County growth that is driven more by the strength and superiority of its schools than by affordable housing or easy commuting options, it is disconcerting to observe that the budget looks to decrease needed funding to our schools. In this tight fiscal period, the County Executive's Recommended Operating Budget represents hard choices and there are no easy solutions, but I am here to tell you of the fundamental needs which remain unmet in our cluster. Further details and examples are in the written testimony I provided.

In the cluster of schools that includes Beall, College Gardens, Ritchie Park, and Twinbrook Elementary, Julius West Middle, and Richard Montgomery High Schools, we will be especially hard-hit in the proposed budget, since we are growing in size. Reductions in Operating Budget outlays always result in increased class sizes, which will surely be the case here, with a \$51 million cut equating to a loss of approximately 400 teaching positions. The proposed reduction will also jeopardize initiatives, such as additional elementary school Assistant Principals, counselors, lunch hour aides and expanded Middle School Reform that are strongly supported by our communities.

This fall, College Gardens Elementary School was excited and proud to be accredited as the first Primary Years Programme in the State of Maryland. The Richard Montgomery cluster now offers the complete set: Primary Years, Middle Years, and Diploma Programmes. Proposed reductions in coordinating positions supporting these model programs are alarming. Next year, a record number of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students have elected to continue in the MYP at Richard Montgomery. The diversity of students in the program reflects that of the county; for example, in the six years since its introduction, the percentage of African-Americans in the program has more than doubled to 13%, evidence that MCPS' efforts to bridge achievement gaps are succeeding. We are also concerned about proposed cuts to immersion programs. These programs are not amenities; they are crucial investments in a twenty-first century school system.

The Board of Education's proposed budget would have made small strides with regards to elementary and middle school programs, but continuing achievement challenges and the coming High School Assessments suggest that it is unwise to delay addressing critical needs – such as counselors, literacy coaches, and Special Programs staffing – at high schools. The County Executive's Operating Budget proposal also means that the \$40-50 million backlog of maintenance projects will only worsen, potentially impacting the safety and health of our students and teachers.

We need your sage understanding of and response to the pressing educational needs with which we are now confronted. We are looking to you at this pivotal moment to make sound choices for our schools, which are the jewel of this County, and for the children, which are our future. Thank you for your time this evening, your dedication to the children of our community, and your ongoing support for the Richard Montgomery cluster.

**Written Testimony of the  
Richard Montgomery High School Cluster  
on the County Executive's Recommended FY 2009 Operating Budget  
April 9, 2008**

Good evening, President Knapp and Members of the Council. My name is Lori Merrill, and I am one of the MCCPTA Cluster Coordinator for the Richard Montgomery High School Cluster.

Like many other organizations from which you have heard, the Richard Montgomery cluster has grave concerns with the County Executive's proposed Operating Budget, which cuts \$51 million from a proposed Board of Education budget request that was already inadequate to meet the needs of the students and teachers in the County's schools. Like the other speakers here tonight, the Richard Montgomery cluster energetically supports the Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations' FY 2009 Operating Budget Compact, as well as the Resolution on Operating Budget Priorities, and MCCPTA's Resolution in support of more crossing guards and Educational Facilities Officers. In our cluster, Beall Elementary school parents have presented letters and a petition for a crossing guard at an intersection near there school.

The budget proposal before you will fund none of the initiatives needed in our schools. With County growth that is driven more by the strength and superiority of its schools than by, say, affordable housing or easy commuting options, it is disconcerting to observe that the budget looks to decrease needed funding to our schools. In this tight fiscal period, the County Executive's Recommended FY 2009 Operating Budget represents hard choices and no easy solutions, but I am here to tell you of the fundamental needs which remain unmet in the cluster and that will be exacerbated by the Executive's recommended Operating Budget for Montgomery County Public Schools.

In the cluster of schools that includes Beall Elementary, College Gardens Elementary, Ritchie Park Elementary, Twinbrook Elementary, Julius West Middle, and Richard Montgomery High School, we will be especially hard-hit in the proposed budget, since we are growing in size. Reductions in Operating Budget outlays always result in increased class sizes, which will surely be the case here, especially with a \$51 million cut, which equates to a loss of approximately 400 teaching positions. But the proposed \$51 million reduction from the Board of Education's budget request will also jeopardize critical MCPS initiatives to address long-unmet needs, such as additional elementary school Assistant Principals, counselors, and badly-needed lunch hour aides.

We supported the Board of Education's proposed expansion of the Middle School Reform Initiative and Middle School Magnet programs, though we were disappointed that the Board's budget proposal also eliminated Middle School Magnet release periods and teacher positions. However, even the limited initiatives from the Board's proposed budget are now at-risk in the County Executive's proposal, however. We were especially concerned about the elimination of six International Baccalaureate teaching positions, some of which would impact the nationally-recognized IB program at Richard Montgomery High School. These programs, and the superior teachers who staff them, consistently demonstrate their strong value to our community, and are a key reason for the success and high national ranking of Montgomery County's schools. This fall, College Gardens Elementary School was excited and proud to be accredited as the first Primary Years Programme in the State of Maryland. The Richard Montgomery cluster now offers the complete set: Primary Years Programme (PYP); Middle Years Programme (MYP); and Diploma Programme. We have a model for the County and urge you to maintain funding for both staffing and supplies, and to reconsider proposed reductions in teaching or coordinating positions supporting these

landmark programs. The foreseeable impacts to the PYP, MYP, and Diploma programs from the County Executive's budget proposal are alarming. Next year, a record number of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students (175) have elected to continue in the MYP at Richard Montgomery. The diversity of students in the program reflects that of the county; for example, in the six years since introduction of the MYP at RM, the percentage of African-Americans in the program has more than doubled to 13% and the percentage of Hispanics has tripled to 9%. These statistics serve as tangible evidence that MCPS' efforts to bridge the achievement gap are succeeding.

We are also concerned about proposed cuts to immersion programs. The Chinese immersion program at College Gardens Elementary is already at capacity in the younger grade levels, and is on-track to expand a grade level each year for the next two years. Adequate staffing and support are critical to the success of this expansion. These are not amenities; they are crucial investments in a twenty first century school system.

While the Board of Education's proposed budget would have made small strides with regards to elementary and some middle school programs, it did not adequately address needs in our high schools, and we fear that the County Executive's budget proposal would produce the same result. The continuing achievement challenges, highlighted by the disparities in eligibility rates, and the coming High School Assessments suggest that it is unwise to delay addressing critical needs – such as counselors, literacy coaches, and Special Programs staffing – at high schools while completing Middle School Reform and elementary school upgrades.

The deep reductions reflected in the County Executive's Operating Budget proposal mean that the \$40-50 million backlog of maintenance projects will only worsen, potentially impacting the safety and health of our students and teachers. For example, the gym floor at Beall Elementary School continues to be in urgent need of repair, and its playground substrates are in need of replacement. These are safety issues, and should be priorities for redress. We also continue to be disappointed with the sustained reduction in budget growth for texts and materials – from six percent to three percent. The prior six percent annual increase was insufficient to meet the resource needs of our students and teachers, we are confident that a three percent increase will similarly be inadequate.

Finally, the opening of the new Richard Montgomery and College Gardens schools provides an opportunity to note the need for a Site Coordinator to oversee major renovation and rebuilding projects. RM was completed long behind-schedule, and turnovers in – or inattentiveness by – architects, project managers, and others resulted in delays, inspection problems, and costly errors and omissions from projects, with parents having to step in and assume the role of project monitors. A better, more appropriate solution is for the Board to require the use of Site Coordinators on major school renovation or reconstruction projects, and we urge your consideration of this request, which has the support of MCCPTA.

We are looking to you at this pivotal moment to make sound choices for our schools, which are the jewel of this County, and for the children, which are our future. We need your sage understanding of and response to the pressing educational needs with which we are now confronted.

Thank you for your time this evening, your dedication to the children of our community, and your ongoing support for the Richard Montgomery cluster.