

Watkins Mill Cluster

Watkins Mill High School.
Montgomery Village Middle School; Neelsville Middle School
South Lake Elementary School; Stedwick Elementary School; Watkins Mill Elementary School;
Whetstone Elementary School

FY2009 Operating Budget Testimony

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Testimony presented by:

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Good evening President Knapp and members of the County Council. My name is Susan Young and I am a coordinator for the Watkins Mill Cluster, and PTSA President at Montgomery Village Middle School. We understand the difficult choices you face in establishing an FY09 Operating Budget, so we appreciate this opportunity to speak on behalf of our community's schools.

Our theme here tonight will surely echo that of the other clusters: please don't allow our wonderful schools to slide backwards. In the spirit of hoping for the best possible budgetary outcome, I'll share a few of our specific needs in the Watkins Mill cluster.

Closing the gap is not an academic discussion for us, it is a challenge our teachers and parents face every day. This challenge is even greater at schools like our own South Lake Elementary with its 42% mobility, 67% FARM and 33% ESOL rates. We ask you to ensure gains made through smaller class sizes, highly qualified teachers, interactive tools like the Promethean boards, and initiatives like middle school reform, are not lost to excessive budget cuts.

In addition, the parent leaders of the Watkins Mill Cluster, with the full support of its principals, have recently presented a vision for raising academic performance across our schools. First, we plan to maximize the potential and competitiveness of our high school's International Baccalaureate (IB) program, and second, we plan to incorporate the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program across our cluster.

The Watkins Mill High School IB program's first graduates are reporting back from college, convincing us this program makes a big difference. IB students gain tremendously from a world-class education that develops the intellectual, personal, and social skills needed to live, learn and work in a global economy. We believe our program has the potential—and the capacity—to serve even more students. Unfortunately, Watkins Mill's IB program is *the only* MCPS IB Diploma Program without an IB Middle Years Program (MYP) to prepare students for its rigors and opportunities. Bringing the MYP to our cluster will prepare students to take full advantage of the IB Diploma program, and other high-level courses at Watkins Mill.

In addition, there are 12 high schools whose only access to an IB Diploma is at the highly competitive Richard Montgomery magnet; eight of these are upcounty schools. But we have an established program, with extra capacity. By opening our IB Diploma Program to an additional 15-20 upcounty students, both costs and negative impact on other schools are minimized. With a slightly larger IB program to stabilize and lift the top end, we seek to bring the AVID program to our cluster to kick start the academic middle.

AVID comes with a proven track record across the nation. With its focus on students in the academic middle — B, C, and even D students — a relatively small investment per school helps motivate students, shake up stagnant scores and narrow the continuing achievement gap. AVID indicates good success with students, many of whom “may be the first in their families to attend college, many from low-income or minority families.” If AVID doesn't cost effectively hit the mark for our kids, we'd like to know what will.

In closing, we believe strongly in our County, our community and in our cluster teachers, staff and kids. We need your help to show our kids that we *all* believe in them and that together we will give them a chance to succeed. We ask that as you work to balance the many competing needs, you continue to support the schools and other programs diverse communities like ours need to stay vibrant and grow. Thank you.