

Testimony provided to Montgomery County Council
April 15, 2009
by
Montgomery County Council of PTAs
Blair Cluster
Cluster Co-coordinators:
Susan Fleck and Bladimiro Dueñas

1. Estimados oficiales del condado de Montgomery, gracias por la oportunidad de presentar testimonio en nombre de los estudiantes y sus familias de mi vecindad. (Esteemed Montgomery County officials, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in the name of the students and their families in my cluster.)
2. My name is Susan Fleck. I am one of the MCCPTA Blair Cluster coordinators, and the parent of a sixth grader at Takoma Park Middle School. I am here tonight to speak on behalf of nearly 9,000 students and their families in the Blair cluster, with the largest high school in the county, and one of the 5 clusters comprising the Downcounty Consortium and 20% of MCPS students.
3. First, I would like to publicly thank the county and school employees who agreed to give up their COLA in light of these tight budget times. The students and parents thank you for your dedication and duty - gracias.
4. The Blair Cluster supports the MCPS budget as it has been presented to and supported by County Executive Leggett. The support of federal stimulus funds to maintain this budget are required, and we are doing our best at the ground level to share our views with state politicians.
5. As a widely diverse cluster in the southern most point of the county, the Blair cluster is a true melting pot. We are proud of our variety and diversity of race, nationality, ethnicity, and income. (Across the county, Montgomery County Schools demographic balance varies widely by school, but within our cluster, almost all of our schools are a balance of brown, black, and white. A few of our schools are majority latino. Overall our students are almost a third African and African American, almost a third Latino, almost a third white, and about a tenth Asian. Our diversity goes beyond these labels. Our students come from mixed-race and mixed-nationality families, adoptive families, as well as two-mom and two-dad families.)
6. More than half of our students come from families with low incomes and qualify for free lunches. We recognize these families' hardships and are pleased that the stimulus package will support Title 1 schools and special education, given that five of the county's 28 title 1 schools are in the Blair Cluster (East Silver Spring ES, Montgomery Knolls ES, New Hampshire Estates ES, Oakview ES, and Rolling Terrace ES) and will benefit from the stimulus money, particularly the reading specialists for East Silver Spring ES and Oakview ES.
7. **We appreciate the support of MCPS for the middle school reforms in this tight budget environment.** Academic intervention staff at our middle schools are an essential resource to support students who are performing below grade

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level. (At *Eastern Middle School* they work one-on-one to address specific gaps in achievement in reading and math and with behavior and attendance. These teachers at *Silver Spring International Middle School* have allowed SSIMS to meet AYP the past two years.)

8. **The Blair Cluster of PTAs recognize the importance of supporting the most vulnerable, especially during an economic downturn.** We also think that investing in children is one of the best ways to support long-term economic development and have productive, crime-free communities. The structural barrier of ‘International’ students access to higher education is a fix that goes beyond budgets - about 10% of students have no chance to go to college because they lack residency. This is a waste of human capital. Any initiatives you can provide to support international students access to jobs, community college and university education are important steps in assuring the safety of our streets and the vibrancy of our community.

9. In these precarious budget times, neither I nor my fellow parent leaders in the cluster want to rob Peter to pay Paul - we just ask you to have the wisdom and foresight to invest in our future despite the strictures of the present. We are acutely aware of the many opportunities that children and their families benefit from with Montgomery County funding related to youth, many of them through our schools. I share with you the many ways that community organizations and the Recreation Department support our students to expand their opportunities for improved academic achievement, address the whole student, keep them off the street, and bring their parents into the schools.

10. Improved academic achievement

- a. The George B. Thomas Learning Academy at Blair High School has provided great opportunities for students to get additional academic support.
- b. Linkages to learning programs at New Hampshire Estates ES, Montgomery Knolls ES, and other local schools.

11. Address the whole student

- a. Such as the just opened School-based Health Center at New Hampshire Estates Elementary School, which is fully funded.

12. Keep students off the street and out of trouble

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- a. With the Blair Sports Academy, and the middle school after-school programs supported by Rec Extra, all of which are slated for reduction in the Recreation Dept. budget. (The high school sports academies provide tutoring support and a sports outlet for students who are not academically eligible for sports. The middle-school after school programs provide a wide-array of clubs for students in schools whose parent base can not support extra-curricular activities.
- b. With the recently re-opened Piney Branch ES Pool, which is now managed by the community-oriented Adventist Services with money from the Recreation Department.
- c. With the Sharp Suspension Intervention program based at the Methodist church across from Blair High School and serving our local middle and high school students. (We applaud MCPS for reducing out of school suspension rates, which has reduced, but not eliminated, the need for this program.)
- d. With the Gang Prevention Task Force that has worked closely with Rolling Terrace ES.

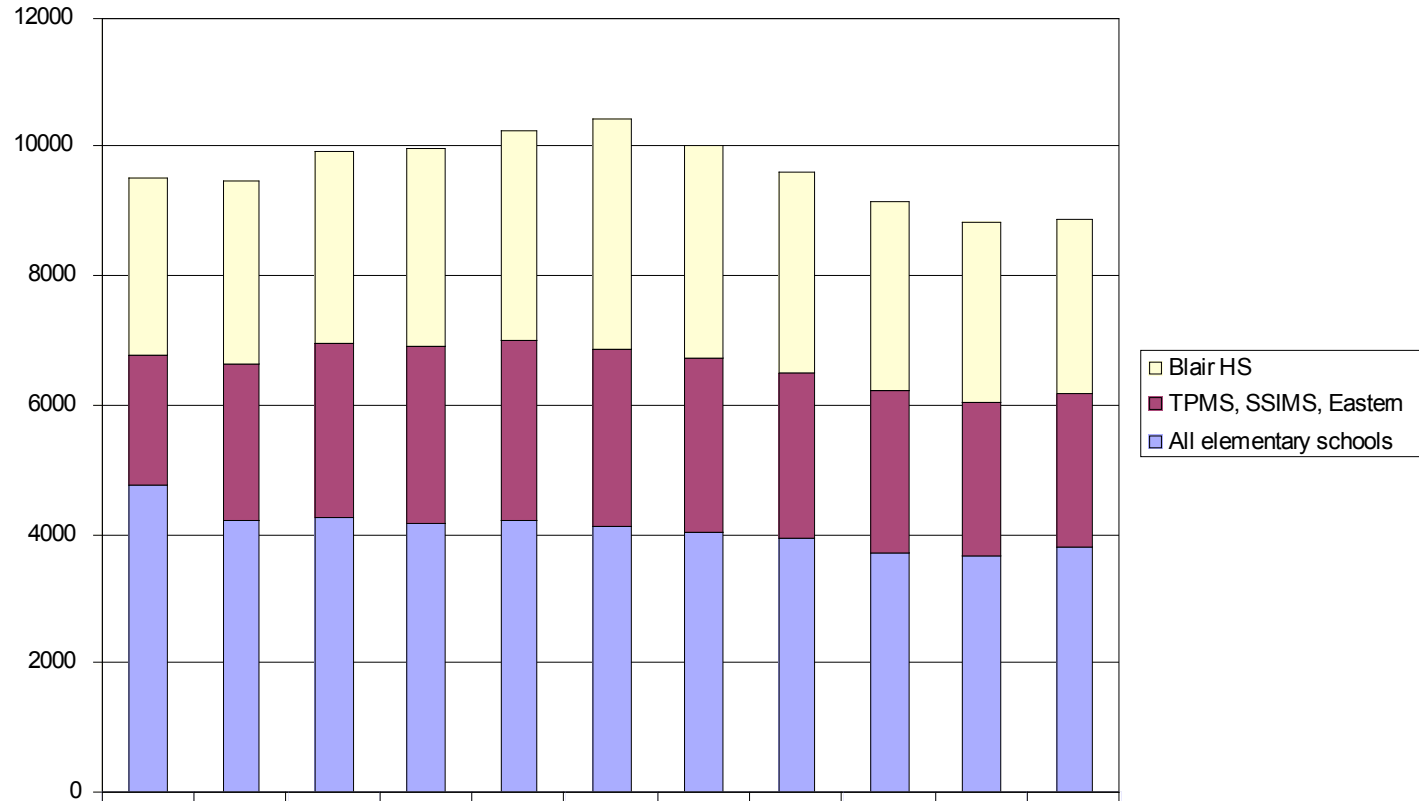
13. Bring parents into schools

- a. IMPACT in the Schools has developed parent leaders in 5 of our clusters' schools. These parents have gained an understanding of the schools, their children's academic success has improved, and they have become leaders in their communities and their schools.

14. All but one of these programs mentioned above are slated for reduction. As members of the community, we come to you and make our plea 'Buddy, can you spare a dime?'. We know you have no dimes to spare, but we do ask that you think wisely about how to protect the most vulnerable and how to maintain equity and excellence for our young people.

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Blair Cluster Enrollment Past 11 years



Blair HS	2755	2824	2975	3087	3207	3547	3292	3081	2930	2764	2714
TPMS, SSIMS, Eastern	2023	2434	2733	2764	2792	2783	2697	2592	2473	2384	2370
All elementary schools	4760	4214	4250	4158	4245	4115	4036	3932	3743	3682	3819

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