

## **Magruder Cluster Operating Budget Testimony to County Council - April 16, 2009**

Good evening to all of the members of the County Council. My name is Annie Foster Ahmed and I am one of the MCCPTA Cluster Coordinators for Magruder High School. Thank you for this opportunity.

We recognize that we are facing extremely tight budget times that may extend until next year. The budget presented to the County Executive by the BOE included significant program cuts and a slow down in rolling out initiatives. We support full funding of the BOE request and urge the council not to substitute too many Federal and State funds intended for education to serve areas that should be the county's obligation. In fact, we hope you may be able to restore a little more funding to lessen the impact of the cuts.

I want to point out three areas that are of great concern to us in the Magruder Cluster: maintaining relatively low class sizes, maintaining qualified teachers at our schools, and providing support such as Literacy Coaches to our high schools to ensure that students are ready for college.

Elementary classes in the Magruder Cluster are already at the top end of the suggested change and it is likely that many of our county schools are in the same position. We believe that our schools have already been affected by past budgetary constraints, as we have had to adapt to the slowly increasing class sizes – in particular to our Kindergarten classes. Our cluster schools are already carrying an average class size for Kindergarten of anywhere from 17 to 19. The Magruder Cluster believes we must hold the line here. Lower class size in Montgomery County has set us apart from other school districts and we believe that our students have benefitted greatly from this initiative. We must protect the initiatives that most directly affect the students.

Further, we are concerned about some of the staff reductions that face our schools with slightly lower enrollment numbers. These reductions only server to reduce the time, energy and attention that teachers give to our students and I can only image the impact this will have on standardized tests as students are being prepared to become college ready.

The roll out of Middle School Reform was significant to the Magruder cluster. Shady Grove Middle School was included in this process and has benefitted greatly from the additional resources designed to address the many concerns of our middle school population. We are sincerely thankful for this initiative. However, we are concerned that budget shortfalls will impact the maintenance of qualified staff to support this initiative. We need to ensure that we do not backslide from the progress we have

made by cutting back on the resources that supports the middle school reform initiative. There are 23 schools, like Redland Middle in our cluster, still waiting their turn for the roll out of Middle School Reform. As a parent of a sixth grader at Shady Grove Middle School, I am personally benefitting from the resources that are provided by this reform and recognize that all children in our county should be receiving these same resources. MCPS needs adequate funding to continue roll out for this initiative and to maintain the qualified staff to deliver the Reform.

Making sure that our students can graduate from high school and are prepared for college is our ending educational goal. We must ensure that MCPS has sufficient funding to help students successfully complete the HSA and achieve good scores on their standardized tests. The University of MD wants our talented students but we need initiatives and staff, such as Academic Intervention Specialists and Literacy Coaches, to ensure that they are ready to compete with the out-of-state pool. An inadequate budget may result in cuts that impact progress on this issue.

We recognize and appreciate that cuts are necessary to meet this year's budget, however, we must keep direct services to students as a top priority.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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