

FY2010 Operating Budget Testimony
April 15, 2009
Wheaton Cluster

Good evening, County Council Members. My name is Chris Zawlocki and along with Grace Ibanez-Barnes, we represent the parents, PTSAs and schools of the Wheaton Cluster. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to present our priorities and concerns. We realize that sacrifices will need to be made during this time of economic hardship/crisis and that we are faced with budget restraints and cutbacks in some shape or form. I would like to present the top priorities that our schools cannot live without and are integral to our students' success and performance.

High School: Wheaton High School

The academies are working at Wheaton High School and are the vehicle helping us raise student achievement. Eligibility, honor roll, SAT participation and score, and Advanced Placement participation have all increased. The academies help provide rigor for our students, i.e., pathways that lead to honors and AP classes, relationships with Academy teachers who become mentors to our students, and relevancy – career partnerships that lead to opportunities and scholarships that students might not otherwise receive, especially in this Cluster. For example, students in the Biomedical Academy received \$1.5 million in scholarships last year and engineering students received \$2.3 million. The Academies continue to grow and the Biomedical Academy has grown almost **six fold** over two years.

Here are some of the trends affecting Wheaton HS: The percentage of incoming FARMS students continues to increase, e.g., in 2003-04 it was forty-five percent of the ninth grade class, in 2008-09 it has jumped to sixty-five percent. The percentage of students in Honors and AP classes (grades 10-12) is more than double in most of the Academies as compared to the nonacademy students. The percentage of students making the Honor Roll is increasing, and the Academies continue to have the highest percentages of students in this group (example : nonacademy 20% in 4th quarter last year, Biomedical 37%, IGCS 53%). Eligibility rates for Academy vs. nonacademy students are even higher—Fourth quarter last year nonacademy eligibility rate: 57%; Biomedical: 82%; Engineering: 70%; IGCS (Institute for Global and Cultural Studies): 88%; IT: 70%.

To be on an equal footing with other schools in the recruitment of students for academies, Wheaton HS needs the building/facility and equipment to attract interested students to our Academy programs so we can continue the trend of improved

performance, higher eligibility rates, and educational opportunities for students in the DCC.

Middle Schools: E. Loiederman and Parkland

Our biggest priority is the restoration of funds for the Middle School Magnet Consortium (MSMC). This is urgent as our program depends on it. This would involve the restoration of the administrative level magnet coordinator positions at Loiederman and Parkland (and Argyle) and 6.0 teachers at the three schools. In combination with other budget cuts, we anticipate losing 6 teachers at Loiederman and 5 teachers at Parkland alone and the associated 30 classes. Our unique, 8 period schedule has attracted students to the magnet and allowed students to experience accelerated and enriched courses in the arts, math, English, science and social studies. At Loiederman and Parkland, we have created and piloted 8 courses that have expanded to other middle schools in the County. In addition, in collaboration with other MSMC schools, we created and piloted accelerated courses in social studies and English. Without the MSMC program drawing students from neighborhoods throughout the County, Loiederman would have a 61% FARMS rate and Parkland a 65% FARMS rate. The grant from the federal government four years ago sought to reduce socioeconomic isolation, provide choices for families, and enhance instruction. Continued MCPS funding would enable us to continue to make progress toward these goals.

While we recognize the hard financial times, cutting a program that has provided so much to not just the MSMC children, but to MCPS as a whole is not a wise choice. Middle School reform has become one of the system's highest priorities, removing a program that has been a test bed and development tool for parts of that initiative would weaken the whole. Please recognize that this program is not just an MCPS initiative, it is a large community one. At Parkland, this community includes such organizations as Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, and NASA as well as the higher educational institutions of the University of Maryland, and Montgomery College. It may seem that adding an additional class to the teachers' load is a small sacrifice. But it means the loss of time to work with the Partners to provide the children with educational opportunities in the real world that they are seeking to enter. It means less time to help students meet the educational challenges of greater and accelerated science and math curriculums that our future scientists and engineers need. While there would still be a program, it would be doing much less to challenge our children and prepare them for the real world.

Elementary Schools: Brookhaven, Harmony Hills, Sargent Shriver, Viers Mill, Weller Road, Wheaton Woods

All six elementary schools in the Wheaton Cluster are Title I schools, with more than 55% FARMS and 30-50% of students receiving ESOL support. All six elementary

schools have made AYP in all sub-groups and continue to increase student proficiency and close the achievement gap. Some have received national recognition for this student success. One of our key operating budget concerns is to keep the low class-size a very high priority. Two of our other priorities: 1) Sustain Academic Intervention positions that allow elementary schools like ours to provide specific reading and math interventions, five days a week. Both of these budget items allow us to prepare our students with background knowledge, vocabulary, math concepts, and problem-solving skills to compete for scholarships, top colleges, and careers with other MCPS students and students from around the world. 2) Since all of the schools have extended day programs (after school instructional activities), preserve funding for activity buses. (These funds were frozen this year, resulting, for some schools to scramble to find money to provide transportation for our programs.)

These are hard times for the County, however our cluster has made impressive gains in so many areas (academic proficiency, national awards, reduced suspensions, increased college scholarships, parent training, etc.) We hope to keep our schools as strong as possible while we absorb the cuts that are required. We realize you have some difficult decisions to make and appreciate your consideration of our issues. Thank you for your time and attention.

Attachments