

WHITMAN CLUSTER

Walt Whitman High School
Thomas W. Pyle Middle School

Bannockburn Elementary School
Bethesda Elementary School (shared)
Bradley Hills Elementary School
Burning Tree Elementary School
Carderock Springs Elementary School
Wood Acres Elementary School

FY 2010 Operating Budget Testimony

April 15, 2009

Good evening, President Andrews, Vice President Berliner, and Distinguished Members of the County Council. My name is Deborah Goldman and with me tonight is my Whitman Cluster Co-Coordinator, Keith Parsky.

No one needs to remind you that our community and nation are confronting an extremely difficult fiscal environment. We are mindful and supportive of the steps our Superintendent and Board of Education took when preparing a responsible 2010 Operating Budget. We are also extremely grateful to MCPS staff and teachers who sacrificed and generously agreed to forego their cost-of-living wage adjustments slated for next year, so that our children would not be adversely affected in the classroom by these grim economic times. The Whitman Cluster's highest priority is to maintain class size at current levels. We believe the proposed Operating Budget reflects that priority, and ask you to fully fund the proposed budget so that class size will not increase.

As you know, in the past, the Whitman Cluster has strongly advocated for increasing the number of guidance counselors in the schools. We wish we could sit

before you tonight and ask you to find additional money so that the Board of Education is able to fund more guidance counselors, because we truly believe that as our children face life's ever increasing complexities, guidance counselors are more urgently needed. Last year, we also testified in support of sufficient funding for special education staffing. Indeed, we continue to believe that proper levels of staffing for both the general and special education population impacts all of our students' educational experience. We wish we could sit before you tonight and also ask you to find additional money so that the Board of Education can increase funding for hours-based staffing.

We also testified in support of the Assistant Principal Initiative and lunch/recess aides increases. We still believe that Assistant Principals in Elementary Schools provide needed support to those schools. And we still firmly believe that there should be increased supervision of our youngest children at recess. We wish we could sit before you tonight and ask that you work with the Board of Education to also find a way to place an Assistant Principal in every Elementary School, and that you increase funding for more recess aides.

Overall, the clear thrust of our testimony in previous years was aimed at ways we could improve staffing levels in many areas because increased staffing allows our children to learn more effectively in a safer, more positive environment. Given the dire state of the budget, however, we are not sitting before you tonight asking that you grant our wishes for additional funding of any of these important initiatives for which we testified in past years.

Instead of wishing away the grim realities of today's economic situation, we will continue working with you and will support you in holding the line on the most basic and important staffing level - the current student-teacher ratio. That ratio is the most important factor for helping our children to learn effectively. We, therefore, do sit before you tonight, simply asking you to try and find a way to fully fund the school system's proposed operating budget, so that the Board of Education can maintain the Whitman Cluster's top staffing priority - the current level of class-size.

At the Operating Budget Forum on January 5th, we heard your request that we focus on Annapolis, so that we receive our fair share of the State's Budget. In response to that request, the Whitman Cluster organized two letter and email campaigns to lobby and inform our Governor and state legislators about Montgomery County's concerns.¹ Twice, we visited Annapolis to meet with our legislators and express to them our concerns.² We will continue to work with MCCPTA, the Board of Education, and you to remind our state legislators that, although we wish it wasn't so, Montgomery County has also been hard hit by this economic downturn and cannot be taken for granted or neglected.

Thank you and good evening.

¹ See Attachment A, Example of letters sent to Governor O'Malley and examples of e-mails sent to District 16's State delegation

² See Attachment B, picture of Whitman Cluster's visit to Annapolis in March.