

**Testimony of the Richard Montgomery Cluster  
on the Superintendent's Recommended FY 2008 Operating Budget  
January 10, 2007**

Good evening, President Navarro, Members of the Board of Education, and Dr. Weast. My name is Elizabeth Enders, and I am a Cluster Coordinator for the Richard Montgomery Cluster.

Like the other parent organizations here tonight, the Richard Montgomery cluster supports the Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations' (MCCPTA's) FY2008 operating budget compact, as well as MCCPTA's resolution on operating budget priorities, and its testimony on the Proposed FY2008 Operating Budget. There are many things to commend in the Superintendent's Recommended FY2008 Operating Budget, but there are also proposals which give us concern, and fundamental needs which remain unmet in the cluster.

As an initial matter, we would like to thank MCPS for its continuing support of our International Baccalaureate programs at College Gardens, Julius West, and Richard Montgomery. These programs continue to demonstrate their strong value to our community, and regularly draw national attention for their excellence. In this context, we urge the Board to maintain funding for the Middle Years Program at Julius West and ensure that necessary technology upgrades, including computers for the school's successful music and art programs, are provided.

We also endorse MCPS' efforts to close the achievement gap among diverse student populations, and encourage the Board and MCPS to emphasize this effort beginning at the elementary school level with the addition of Primary Years Programs. In high schools, like Richard Montgomery, there is a growing need for literacy coaches, which yield sizable rewards across the educational achievement spectrum, in addition to closing the achievement gap at the upper levels.

We applaud the addition of assistant principals at elementary schools, and we particularly thank you for listening to our prior requests to add an assistant principal to College Gardens Elementary School. We also strongly support the proposed increase in high school resource counselor positions and days. Likewise, the proposed new ratio of middle school students to counselors of 223:1 – down from 250:1 – is a welcome improvement.

One of MCCPTA's goals is an expansion in Parent Community Outreach Coordinators, which is critical to a community as diverse as that served in the Richard Montgomery cluster. This feature additionally supports MCCPTA's expressed theme of two-way communication, which will serve to meaningfully include concerned parents and community representatives in budget determinations, with the objective of truly meeting every student's needs. While we commend MCPS' for the addition of a systems programmer for translation services to help make schools more family-friendly and increase communication in response to the growing need for such services, we urge the Board to additionally consider increasing the presence of school-based community coordinators, rather than mere additions to the central office staff.

Of significant concern to many of the parents and communities present here tonight are the major realignments proposed in special education services, and particularly cuts to the Learning Centers, which have heretofore functioned well in meeting the special education needs of our community. To be honest, we are unsure of what the impact of these momentous changes will be upon the children and families that have come to rely upon them with confidence, or whether MCPS itself has even assessed those impacts to the home schools and students before making such a profound recommendation.

We similarly continue to endorse the April 2005 MCCPTA Delegate Resolution supporting a continuum of services for special education services, which is the best approach to achieving success for affected students over the long term, as well as the Delegates' April 2006 Resolution regarding the need to provide a "sequenced and systematic" gifted and talented curriculum at local schools, not merely magnet schools. In short, what is needed is a continuum of services for *all* students that serves our diverse population. Our children represent a spectrum of needs, and each deserves an appropriate education. Some are struggling; some are not being challenged enough; some are gifted and talented or are learning-disabled and need extra challenge with supports. All of these students must be served, and we must ensure that, as we work to close the gap, we concomitantly raise the bar for *all* students, and not just those at the lower end.

We are likewise disappointed that the previous growth in the budget for texts and materials has been cut in half – from 6 percent to 3 percent. Since the prior 6 percent annual increase was insufficient to meet the resource needs of our students and teachers, we are confident that a 3 percent increase – coupled with a \$210,000 cut in stipends for drafting curriculum materials – will similarly be inadequate. In the same vein, we regret the cuts of almost \$1 million in funding for teacher training and development in the proposed budget.

Last year, we voiced our wholehearted support for the safe and secure schools initiative, and noted that Richard Montgomery High School needed additional security staff, for both on-site school security and pedestrian safety. Regrettably, we have not seen improvement in these areas. Indeed, there have been increased reports of theft at Richard Montgomery, and the only meaningful contributions to the safety of our students and faculty who walk to school have come from the City of Rockville, particularly the Rockville City Police, and the efforts of concerned parent and student leaders. We urge the Board and MCPS to plan for and meet the pedestrian safety needs of Richard Montgomery – and all schools in the county, in cooperation with local authorities and concerned communities.

Our inconsistent experience with major renovation and rebuilding projects, such as Richard Montgomery and College Gardens, supports the wisdom and need for a Site Coordinator to oversee such major projects. Turnovers in – or inattentiveness by – architects, project managers, and others paid to ensure that a school reconstruction or renovation remains on schedule and is completed with all required elements, have resulted in delays, inspection problems, and costly errors or omissions from projects, with parents having to step in and assume the role of project monitors. A better, more appropriate solution is for the Board to require the use of Site Coordinators on major school renovation or reconstruction projects, and we urge your consideration of this request.

In the realm of maintenance, Beall Elementary School has a longstanding need to repair the ventilation of its computer laboratory. This problem was discovered when roof repairs were completed well over a year ago, but the problem still hasn't been addressed. As a result, the computer lab gets far too hot, and it is only a matter of time before the computer equipment is permanently and adversely impacted. In the interim, Beall has brought in special lighting, so that the overhead lights can be left off, in order to reduce the heat they generate. Additionally, Beall's gym floor continues to be in urgent need of repair, and its playground substrates are in desperate need of replacement. The playgrounds lack wood chips to cushion the children's falls from the playground equipment, which presents a serious hazard. These are safety issues, and should be priorities for redress.

We also ask your support for junior varsity lacrosse for all county high schools, as an important and rewarding addition to the athletic program opportunities for our youth. On a similar note, we endorse the proposed "Sports and Entertainment Management Academy" at Richard Montgomery as an engaging, alternative, and increasingly relevant academic pursuit for interested students.

Thank you for your time this evening, your dedication to the children of our community, and your ongoing support for the Richard Montgomery cluster.