

**Testimony of Dr. Liza Durant,
Churchill Cluster Co-Coordinator
Submitted on behalf of the Winston Churchill Cluster PTA/PTSAs
January 10, 2007**

President Navarro, Dr. Weast and Members of the Board of Education,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you tonight. My name is Liza Durant and I along with Livleen Gill and Jinhee Wilde serve as the Winston Churchill Cluster Co-Coordinator representing 6500 children and their families. I am pleased to report that our children are challenged and love learning in our community but there are still numerous needs in the Churchill Cluster that are not addressed in the Superintendent's FY2008 Operating Budget. As requested, I have organized the Cluster's needs according to the Goals of the MCPS Strategic Plan.

In the category of the First Goal, "To Ensure the Success of Every Student", the Churchill Cluster is blessed with a diverse community, with diverse learning needs, and we must continue to insist that our public education system meet the needs of every child. Accordingly, additional paraeducators to support our special education community are among our most urgent requests. In particular at **Beverly Farms Elementary School** where three special education classes are housed, we request that the Special Education Coordinator that was eliminated this year be reinstated along with the addition of a half-time paraeducator. Likewise, **Bells Mill and Potomac Elementary Schools** need an additional part time paraeducator position each to adequately meet the needs of their communities. Over 30% of students at **Wayside Elementary School** are from diverse, multicultural backgrounds, and we request that the ESOL staff and speech staff positions be increased to full time.

Before moving on to our Cluster's needs in the other 4 areas of the strategic plan, I want to discuss the Superintendent's Proposal to phase out the Secondary Learning Centers, a plan which will surely impact the success of every student in our community. The Churchill Cluster is frustrated with the timing of this proposal because we have not had the opportunity to bring this issue to the full PTA membership. However, we have met with the PTA leadership, and heard from countless individual parents as well as staff and principals. What we have is a consensus that there are many unanswered questions associated with the implementation of this plan. For example: when will the teachers in the home schools receive adequate training to address the needs of the new students? what will happen to the personnel who staff the Learning Centers and their expertise? how will we leverage their expertise in the new setting? how will the success of integrating these students be evaluated? will this model be carried into the elementary schools or to those students at the

other end of the learning spectrum? How will additional classroom space be provided to those students whose IEP's require self-contained classroom programming? how will MCPS fund the resources, staff, training, classroom space, and materials to support the displaced students? We are counting on you as our leaders and elected officials to ask these questions and to evaluate the feasibility and potential for success of this plan in the context of MCPS' Strategic Plan to Ensure the Success of Every Child. This issue will be at the top of every PTA's agenda in January and we plan to provide a follow up letter with a formal position as soon as possible. In the meantime, I think I can give you heads up by reporting that every parent who has contacted me about this issue is opposed to the county-wide closure of these learning centers and in favor of preserving some continuum of services and a diversity of options to meet the needs of our special education community.

In the category of the Second Goal, "to Provide an Adequate Instructional Program", support for our elementary school math programs continues to be a top priority in our Cluster. **Bells Mill, Seven Locks** and **Potomac Elementary Schools** each request a math content specialist as staffed at other elementary schools and to assist with the implementation of accelerated math curriculum. **Beverly Farms** requests allocation of a full time position to support it's accelerated math program which is so overcrowded there are not enough desks for each child in the third grade classroom. **Winston Churchill High School** requests that when new or accelerated curriculum are introduced that funds be provided to procure the teaching materials in advance so that teachers are adequately prepared and so that our school administrators do not have to make a tough choice to sacrifice the successful implementation of one program in order to roll out another in the final hour.

Beyond the math curriculum, our Cluster has additional needs including teachers with training in specialized subjects and in techniques to teach accelerated curriculum at **Cabin John Middle School**, and a full-time reading initiative teacher at **Seven Locks** and **Bells Mill** to support their language arts programs.

In the Category of the Third Goal, "to Strengthen Productive Partnerships for Education", we support the implementation of Ed-Line at all secondary schools but ask that it be adequately tested and evaluated to ensure that it functions properly before it's widespread implementation. We also request expansion of programs for the prevention of bullying and gang activities including counseling, and after school activities such as additional team sports. Finally, we ask you to continue to work as partners with the community and to include us in discussions about what fails and what works and strategies to ensure the success of public education and also to provide additional support for the important work performed by the Parent Community Outreach Coordinators.

In the category of the Fourth Goal, "to Create a Positive Work Environment..." we request resources to ensure the timely and adequate training of teachers in

preparation for the roll-out of new curriculum, to support their ability to achieve full inclusion of special education students, and support for the training of maintenance and air and water quality staff to meet the tremendous challenges of the antiquated infrastructure of several of our decades old buildings, particularly **Potomac Elementary School** which has yet to be scheduled for a date for modernization.

In the category of the Fifth Goal, “to Provide High Quality Business Services.....” we make some of our most serious requests as they relate to the health and safety of our students and staff. Imagine a Code Red emergency at **Beverly Farms, Seven Locks, Potomac** or **Wayside** elementary schools and the children washing hands in the bathrooms, working on art projects in hallways or listening to a story or having a lesson outdoors would never know because the Public Address system in these decades old buildings does not extend to these areas. We request that this oversight be corrected immediately. Recess supervision remains a top concern for parents in our community with large groups of students, nearly two hundred for example at **Potomac Elementary**, being supervised by two amazing staff. In some cases, portable classrooms and construction projects make supervision challenging or impossible. Accordingly, **Beverly Farms, Potomac** and **Wayside** request an additional part time staff position each to ensure the safety of the children playing outside of the secured buildings. The safety of students in and around the middle school buildings is also of concern and we request that **Hoover Middle School** be among the first to pilot monitoring cameras in the hallways and to utilize a swipe card system to limit entry to the buildings and that broken outdoor lighting be repaired at **Cabin John** to ensure the safety of students and staff as they utilize the facility at sunset for afternoon programs and sports and evening functions. And finally, we ask that **Cabin John’s** multi-year plea for repair or replacement of nearly defunct air conditioning units be answered once and for all so that the staff and students at this facility can operate in a comfortable learning and professional environment.

In closing, I leave you with one final thought. While we applaud the initiative to end the use of portable classrooms across the County, we recognize that it will be many years before we have the necessary infrastructure to replace them. In the meantime, we request that all portable classrooms have a comprehensive, proactive maintenance plan specifically designed and implemented according to the specific uses and circumstances of the portables at each individual school, with quality standards established at the county level.

We appreciate your careful consideration of our requests and the testimony of our MCCPTA President and fellow Clusters across the County.

Thank you for your attention tonight and the work you do for our community each day.

**Testimony of Dr. Liza Durant,
Churchill Cluster Co-Coordinator
Submitted on behalf of the Winston Churchill Cluster PTAs
January 10, 2007**

Table of Staff Position Requests for Churchill Cluster FY2008

MCPS Strategic Plan Goal	Position Description	BFES	BMES	CJMS	HHMS	PES	SLES	WES
1	Paraeducator for Special Education	0.5	0.5			0.5		
1	Special Education Coordinator	0.5						
1	ESOL							0.2
1	Speech							0.5
1	Art, PE, Music							0.3
2	Math Content Specialist		1			1	1	
2	Math Instruction - Accelerated	1						
2	Literacy Support		1				0.4	
2	Technology Support/Instruction					1		
2	Arts Integration					0.2		
2	Chinese Immersion					0.5		
2	Web Site Maintenance			Part time	0.5			
2	Subject Teachers			Additional				
5	Paraeducator Recess Support/Other	0.5				0.5	0.5	0.5