

Before the Montgomery County Board Of Education

FY 2008 Operating Budget Testimony
Poolesville Cluster

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Good evening President Navarro, Members of the Board and Dr. Weast. My name is Roger Hayden. I am speaking as cluster coordinator for Poolesville. We appreciate the opportunity to address this board.

We support the MCCPTA testimony given last night by President de Winter, its Operating Budget Compact, and Resolution on Operating Budget priorities. We believe that our success is integrally linked to the success of the school system as a whole and the MCCPTA positions further the overall good.

We are the direct beneficiary of an important MCPS initiative with the inauguration of the Whole School Magnet Program at Poolesville High School. It serves nine up-county clusters. Added to the outstanding Global Ecology Studies Program already located at the school is a Science, Math and Computer Science, and a much needed Humanities Program. A prominent budget line item is the funding for two full time educators to implement the new magnet programs as the first 9th graders transition to the 10th grade. It will continue to be an important priority to see that there is sufficient funding for all aspects of the program to assure it meets its two fold goals of (a) providing an educational program for the certificate students commensurate with the other successful magnet programs in the county, and (b) providing an integrated educational experience for certificate and non-certificate students.

While we support MCCPTA as well as our surrounding clusters, and taking into consideration the enhancement of our High School offerings for the highly able, we remain concerned that the budget and its initiatives do not always address the needs of our little cluster as a whole. We are the smallest

cluster consisting of two Elementary Schools and one Middle School feeding into the High School. The High School will continue to serve the students within its boundaries who are not part of the magnet certificate programs.

It is difficult to determine what impact the budget will have for us. In part, that lies in what we see as a failure in communication by school officials. Through the creation of the Magnet Program, we know first hand how effective MCPS can be in implementing programs and involving parents in a meaningful way – the two way communication President de Winter called for. MCPS to date has done a wonderful job of inclusiveness with all stakeholders and partners.

We are at a loss, therefore, when we see the reaction of the Special Education community over the apparent elimination of Learning Centers. We have no official position on the correctness of this action because we have not had the time to digest the rapidly developing information. Certainly, we have not been able to discern its impact on our cluster. In part, that is due to the general lack of information and parent involvement which we believe underlies the outcry of parents directly concerned with the issue – lack of timely notice and exchange of communication. We can see that it has lead to a sense of disappointment, cynicism and distrust among the affected groups. The arguments against the proposed change in the delivery of Special Education Services are compelling. We do not believe these proposed changes should be advanced further until sufficient time is given for input by all interested parties and deliberation on the issue.

With regard to budget initiatives, we are concerned about cuts in funding for teacher training and text books. We are given explanations and told it will not materially affect these important school needs. We applaud the middle school initiatives, but do not know how they will translate to a positive impact in our cluster. We are excited about the funding for additional High School resource teachers, positions for art, music and PE at the elementary level and the like, but do not know if any of the initiatives will be directed to our cluster. We do not see funding to address the concerns our rural schools have for safety and security. We want to know that our educators are fairly compensated so that we can attract the best teachers. We can only wait with cautious optimism and confidence that the professionals at MCPS under the guidance of this board have a clear vision in mind. That is why we support President de Winter when she cautions “Plan Before You Land.”

I also want to bring to your attention a pet peeve of mine, but shared with many parents throughout the school system. I learned this year that MCPS does not fund a Junior Varsity Lacrosse team for either girls or boys. This is decidedly unacceptable in view of the fact that Lacrosse is the official Maryland team sport. When a college recruiter seeks players, he or she goes first either to New York or Maryland. We recognize there are many areas which need to be addressed and funds are not unlimited, but I respectfully submit lowering the priority of core sports is counterproductive. Sports programs “keep kids off the street” and teach them team skills and how to have “clean fun.” I know there are at least 50 girls at Poolesville High School who want to play but the Lacrosse Varsity squad alone cannot accommodate most of them. I have every reason to believe the same is true for the boys.

I also believe that sports have special significance for our High School. As referenced, this year Montgomery County’s first Whole School Magnet program was implemented with the inaugural 9th grade class. It is designed to integrate certificate and non-certificate students into a common learning experience to the fullest extent possible. The athletic field brings these students together without regard to academic placement or performance. Omitting an important sports program like JV Lacrosse is a significant missed opportunity to facilitate the goal of this unique program.

I, therefore, call on the Board and MCPS to implement a JV Lacrosse program for every school THIS YEAR – and we know MCPS can do it because we saw the wonders it performed to implement the Whole School magnet in our cluster.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to bring our observations and concerns before you. As stated, we have special experience with the extraordinary abilities and positive side of MCPS. We are grateful for the attention we have received. We do not, however, want this new program for the highly able to overshadow the basic needs of our cluster and the funding needed to assure the highest success for all students. We are confident that is the board’s committed goal as well.