

Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster
Bethesda-Chevy Chase HS
Westland MS
Bethesda ES*Chevy Chase ES*North Chevy Chase ES
Rock Creek Forest ES*Rosemary Hills PS
Somerset ES*Westbrook ES

Testimony on the Superintendent's Recommended FY 2012 Operating Budget
January 19, 2011

Good Evening, Board President Barclay and members of the Board of Education. I am Joy White, co-coordinator with Craig Brown and Mary Cobbett of the Bethesda Chevy Chase Cluster and am grateful to have this opportunity to share our priorities with you tonight on the 2012 Operating Budget for Montgomery County Public Schools. I would also like to thank our cluster principals and members of our community who are with me here this evening.

We know the Board has some difficult decisions to make in the 2012 budget, much more difficult than FY 2011. Let me be clear that we support the Superintendent's maintenance of effort request. Parents in the BCC cluster community also want you to know that we stand behind the MCCPTA operating budget priorities: limiting class sizes as much as possible; maintaining our school facilities; sound curriculum development and implementation; and strong academic support for all students. Meeting these goals is important to the long term success of our children and our local economy. If you are faced with unavoidable cuts, we request that the Board and MCPS take a balanced approach respecting these priorities, rather than protecting one priority to the exclusion of others.

Allow me share with you the BCC Cluster priorities for FY 2012: 1) full implantation of hours-based staffing for special education at our elementary schools and Westland Middle School; 2) provision for a 6th grade program at Chevy Chase and North Chevy Chase Elementary schools until a new middle school for the cluster is built; and 3) maintaining current staffing for academic support teachers at BCC High School.

Hours-Based Staffing for Special Education Students

The BCC Cluster strongly supports preserving the hours-based staffing program to support special education in our elementary schools and extending that program to Westland Middle School. As you know, this program allows MCPS to staff special education programs based on the number of instructional hours rather than the number of students served. Hours-based staffing has proved to be instrumental in helping our children with special needs succeed in elementary school. But when those students arrive at middle school, facing a larger student population than elementary school and tougher academic requirements, they struggle because staffing is dramatically less. Westland is one of just six middle schools in the County that does not have hours-based staffing. Implementing hours-based staffing at Westland will provide vital academic support to our cluster's students with special needs, rather than cutting off such support after 5th grade.

Sixth Grade Program

We have 200 6th graders at Chevy Chase and North Chevy Chase Elementary Schools (almost half of all 6th graders in the cluster) who do not receive the same basic education offerings as 6th graders at Westland Middle School. The Chevy Chase 6th graders receive social studies instruction 2-3 days per week instead of 5 days, PE twice a week instead of 5 times, and an arts rotation for 4 days instead of 5 days a week. While Chevy Chase Elementary has found a way to preserve Spanish language instruction, North Chevy Chase has lost this offering entirely and only offers music once a week for 30 minutes, as opposed to daily in a middle school setting. With a grim budget picture this year and possibly in the future, we fear our students will not be prepared for the rigorous requirements during the rest of their middle school and high school careers.

We would prefer to send our sixth graders to a middle school, but Westland does not have the space to accommodate 200 additional students. Sending 200 more students to Westland would require the installation of 10 relocatable classrooms at a cost of \$750,000. We estimate that it would cost less than \$750,000 to allocate less than 3 full-time teachers to the Chase Elementary Schools to give our 6th graders the education they deserve. Remember, these two hundred 6th graders are middle schoolers attending classes on an elementary school campus—they are middle schoolers and deserve a middle school education.

Academic Support Teachers

Academic support teachers—such as our staff development professionals, ESOL teachers, para-educators, English compositions assistants—are crucial to helping BCC High School deliver a quality education to all students in the face of increased enrollment and declining resources. We urge you to consider the importance of paraeducators, staff development and ESOL teachers to our students's success in the classroom. We are worried that cuts to these positions may impact the long-term success MCPS has had in erasing the achievement gap between white and non-white students. For example, pass rates on AP and IB exams for African-American and Hispanic student more than doubled between 2005 and 2008, but in the following year, we saw a drop in performance for minority students on these tests. We are concerned that cuts to ESOL positions will leave increased numbers of students who speak English as a Second language without the support they need to improve their English and succeed in the rigorous MCPS curriculum. Last year, BCC lost an allocation of 0.2 staff development teachers. Staff development teachers are key advisors to all our teachers, helping them to develop strategies to teach larger classes with students of different learning abilities. Maintaining current staffing levels of academic support is among our top priorities for FY 2012.

Thank you for this opportunity to share the concerns of BCC cluster families with you. We look forward to working with the Board, and with our county and state legislators, to support the budget for our schools. We appreciate the tough decisions you have before you and urge you to do what you can to implement hours-based staffing at Westland Middle School, provide a 6th grade program at the Chase Elementary schools and maintain current staffing levels of academic support at BBC High School.