

# Northwest Cluster

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**Northwest High School**

**Clopper Mill Elementary School**

**Darnestown Elementary School**

**Diamond Elementary School**

**Germantown Elementary School**

**Kingsview Middle School**

**Great Seneca Creek Elementary School**

**Lakelands Park Middle School (shared)**

**Ronald McNair Elementary School**

**Roberto Clemente Middle School (shared)**

**Spark M. Matsunaga Elementary School**

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## Operating Budget Testimony

### to the Board of Education

**January 12, 2011**

Good Evening Dr. Weast, President Barclay, and Board Members. I'm Susan Burkinshaw, one of the Northwest Cluster Coordinators.

Again, our community is facing the worst budget situation in living memory. Our number one request is that you continue to prioritize your decisions based on our children's safety, health and educational well-being in their learning environments. As fellow taxpayers, we would also request that you continue to consider and incorporate environmentally and fiscally responsible solutions that will yield future cost-savings to our county and will also minimize our shared environmental footprint.

Once again, our cluster has decided to forego asking you for anything this year. Our biggest desire with the Operating budget is that you do your best to maintain staffing at the highest possible levels across our county schools. Our human resources are our greatest resources. In the words of one of our Cluster administrators who shared the story of one of his most impressive staff interviews, it was a teacher who said, "Give me a carpet square and a student and I can teach him—everything else is just icing on the cake." We so appreciate the technology and the other bells and whistles we have been blessed with in past years; but now is the time to get back to basics and rely on our exceptional staff.

We encourage you to come up with creative alternatives to permanent staffing cuts and pink slips. Without adequate staffing, our school system stands to lose ground on much of the progress we have gained over the past several years.

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The personnel of our county schools are critical to the academic and social success of our children, who need the support of staff to help them achieve both curricular and extracurricular goals, particularly during these trying times.

As we testified last year, by executing staff cuts through attrition and maintaining other personnel positions, even with the possibility of reduced hours or furloughs, we may help to achieve the goal of maintaining morale in the schools. Most of us – teachers and staff included - would rather have a job than not; and keeping our county employees on payrolls eliminates the need to pay them unemployment benefits out of state coffers. It also keeps money in their pockets to support our local merchants and help support state sales and income tax revenues.

At a minimum, please do your best to maintain the staff development and counseling positions in our schools. Staff Development specialists are critical to maintaining the standard of excellence across all staff levels and serve as a colleague to support and train staff. Counselors are also critical to our county schools. The dynamics of children's lives become increasingly complex as they grow. Staff members in these positions are uniquely qualified and are vital to the success of our school system.

The School Resource Officer (SRO) program is also critical to our schools at this time. While other jurisdictions in our region and across the country are increasing funding to their programs, Montgomery County is threatening to completely eliminate the SRO program next fiscal year. What does everyone else know that we don't know?

As you know, the MCCPTA approved an emergency resolution supporting an SRO in each high school. Currently the 5<sup>th</sup> District shares one of the most dedicated SROs, Officer Russell Larson, among five schools—Northwest, Seneca Valley, Poolesville, Clarksburg and Damascus. He is a virtual superhero, doing his best to spend at least part of each day at some of the largest high schools in the county across the largest geographic police district.

Under this model it is virtually impossible for Officer Larson to build the relationships with students that is the foundation of the School Resource Officer program. Thankfully, he is a special person and is going above and beyond the call of duty to try to make the program work under these circumstances.

As documented in the 2002 Safe School Initiative report by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Secret Service, among other research, most crimes and school violence escalate from simple schoolyard-type bullying and cyber-bullying behavior. Having an SRO in our schools to intercept information about escalating incidents, or to mentor students whom they observe making bad choices, just might result in a priceless outcome.

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In the words of the esteemed Board of Education Member, Laura Berthiaume, who recently said, "Imagine the unthinkable..." We know that the SRO programs are effective at preventing school tragedies. Our own Montgomery County officers have humbly, but heroically, stopped tragedies from happening in our own county schools in recent years. As reported in the press not too long ago, our own SROs stopped a bomb plot at Springbrook High School and a shooting at Quince Orchard, and how many countless other potentially tragic incidents that were not reported by the media?

At the MCCPTA Operating Budget Forum last week we heard our County Council Members say that they cannot fund a Maintenance of Effort (MOE) Budget, despite the fact that it would be breaking the law not to do so. Yet if they do, we will ostensibly benefit from the over \$30M in state school funding we would be eligible for by funding the MOE budget. On the other hand, the County Council Members shared that they spend upwards of \$37M in funding to directly support the school system that is not part of the school system budget. Wouldn't this be a good time to "reach across the aisle" and make a deal? This is our taxpayer money that is being gambled with—please do your part not to stand on ceremony to lose it.

We need to get back to basics with this budget, and "The Little Red Schoolhouse" had not much more than a teacher in the classroom. We encourage you to continue to evaluate this budget closely to ensure that each child in this county is safe in and around their schools. We encourage you to preserve the human resources. We ask that you also continue to promote and execute solutions with long-term cost-efficiencies and minimal environmental impact.

Thank you for maintaining the expectation that all children in our county schools should experience equivalent learning atmospheres, even during this fiscal crisis.

*Respectfully submitted by:*

*Susan Burkinshaw  
Beth Kennington and  
Bob Murphy  
2010-11 Northwest Cluster Coordinators*