

Walter Johnson PTA Cluster

Walter Johnson High School - North Bethesda Middle School - Tilden Middle School - Ashburton Elementary School - Farmland Elementary School - Garrett Park Elementary School - Kensington Parkwood Elementary School - Luxmanor Elementary School - Wyngate Elementary School

Good Evening members of the Board of Education and Superintendent Weast. My name is Jennifer Cope and I am a Walter Johnson Cluster Coordinator, along with Barbara Ferry. We thank you for this opportunity to comment on the proposed MCPS Operating Budget. Our cluster supports the general principle that the County needs to support the maintenance of effort level of funding for our schools. We want to continue the high level of service to our students that has yielded such outstanding results. We understand you have tough funding decisions to make and urge you to focus on the Operating Budget Priorities Resolution set forth by the MCCPTA which states: no reductions in maintenance, building service, nor security staff to maintain safe, secure and healthful schools; no new curriculum without adequate staff development, materials and technology; and, no further increase in class size.

Budget pressures already have forced class sizes up. As a result, some of our classes are already larger than staffing guidelines permit, and this hurts educational quality for every child in the classroom. At the same time, more special needs students are being mainstreamed. Therefore, hours-based staffing for students with learning differences is especially important to minimize adverse impacts on both these students and general education students. We also ask for no reductions in academic intervention, focus, reading, ESOL, special program non-classroom positions, or para-educators. Eliminating those positions will force schools to stop providing programs that give our children access to a high quality education. These programs are especially needed by our neighborhoods, which are undergoing rapid changes in demographics.

This list of priorities represents the most frequently mentioned concerns. Should cuts become necessary we urge you to cut outside the classroom. There needs to be a balanced approach to cutting, so that schools have maximum flexibility to adjust to diminished resources.

In a recent article of the WJ High School newspaper, The Pitch, called “Where is Our Money Going?” the students found out that department heads are making every effort to adjust their budgets because of cuts made by County, State and Federal governments, and the general economic recession. Teaching teams, especially at the elementary school level, are being creative by bringing in part-time reading and math specialists to get class size down for the core academic periods. The teachers are doing the best job they can but it is simply too many children in a classroom during those very important first years of a child's education! We predict as classroom sizes increase, the scores Montgomery County Schools have worked so hard to improve will decline. We strongly encourage the Board to find savings in the current budget situation without increasing class size. Please preserve the student/teacher ratio!

Schools in our cluster are growing rapidly. Not many other clusters will face the extreme future stresses that the additional increased population density will pose to the Walter Johnson Cluster. The White Flint sector plan is projected to add over 1100 students to our schools, which includes developing new residential high-rise apartments, new town homes, and renovated single-family homes. We also have

the Kensington Sector Plan and other developments to consider, which may further increase enrollment in the WJ cluster. We hope the county and the school system are paying attention and will take this future enrollment factor into account as they look at numbers for next year and beyond.

On a final note, we look forward to future dialogue with you and please be aware of our willingness to assist in advocating for our schools on the county and state level.

A special thank you to Dr. Weast for all his years here at MCPS and for the service he has provided in helping our children get a great education! We wish you well in your future endeavors...

Good night!