

WHEATON HIGH SCHOOL
12601 Dalewood Drive, Silver Spring, MD 20906
PARENT • TEACHER • STUDENT • ASSOCIATION

BOARD OF EDUCATION'S HEARING
ON THE
MCPS OPERATING BUDGET

January 19, 2011

Good evening. I am George Gadbois, Acting Wheaton Cluster Coordinator and also Delegate for the Wheaton High School PTSA. I am the proud father of a Wheaton graduate and a current Wheaton junior. Tonight, I am speaking on behalf of the parents, students, and staff of the schools of the Wheaton Cluster.

The Wheaton Cluster supports the Superintendent's Recommended Operating Budget which includes the Maintenance of Effort level request. We also realize that given the current dire financial climate, coupled with other yet-to-be resolved matters in Annapolis, this budget could be challenging. We need to work together to ensure we get the funding and entitlements due us from the Council, Annapolis and Washington. As a responsible governing body, it is your duty to our students to minimize the impact of this financial crisis on their classroom experience by cutting the very least on budget items that matter most to student learning, such as teacher quality, special programs and class size. We urge you to avoid cutting our valued programs to the point of essentially no program. We also would like you to consider equity in programs between schools at the same time. We are well aware this is no small task, but these are unusual economic times with children needing no less support than those that have graduated in recent years.

In order to continue supporting existing initiatives like the Baldrige Core Values, the Academy programs in our Downcounty Consortium, the Middle School Consortium,

Academic Intervention, Focus, ESOL support, our paraeducators, Special Ed, and teacher/coordinator positions at the two Consortiums serving Wheaton students, it is crucial that we maintain as close-to-current levels of staffing in our schools to sustain our current levels of success. We need the current levels of Federal Title 1 funding to remain in place for those schools demonstrating that need. More cuts will begin to impact this success and backslide the achievements gained over the last ten years. Wheaton Cluster has a very diverse population and needs these programs and this critical staff as much as ever.

Wheaton Cluster schools have demonstrated increased student performance steadily over recent years. Documented increased performance touching all our cluster schools has been made possible, in large part, through reduced class size, current levels of staffing, and engaging programs. We again respectfully request that the Board does not permit class sizes to increase beyond the additional one student per class that has already been implemented. This performance, together with how this constituency wants to see their tax dollars spent, is drawn at least in part, from the benefits gained from the Consortium programs. You frequently hear from the students and parents from our two Middle Schools (Loiederman and Parkland) as to its popularity. As well, a recent survey was taken by the MCCPTA – Downcounty Consortium Subcommittee that resulted in most responses indicating a preference for school choice and a belief that the academies are important to their children's success.

To that end, the survey also indicated that 76% of respondents said the most important factor influencing the choice of a particular school was the academy, magnet or program offered. At Wheaton, we feel with having the lowest choice preference of the five schools, it is affecting student morale and will begin to start adversely affecting some of the academic gains Wheaton has recently experienced. With the lower enrollment of top students, this limits the number of certain course requests and

subsequently those courses are then not offered due to low class numbers. Wheaton HS needs a high-end academic program such as a magnet or signature designation to one or two of its existing programs to help attract and keep top students in the Wheaton Cluster. The infrastructure is already there with existing academies. MCPS has historically placed such programs in schools as a solution to attract students to under-enrolled schools or schools losing their top academic performers to other high schools. While we have many programs serving special students not necessarily on a diploma track, we are not perceived to be able to serve high-achievers. Wheaton needs to be able to serve the needs of all students, and have the means to implement initiatives to attract and retain the top performers. A magnet will do this as it has in other schools.

We cannot go without mentioning busing. With the advocacy of the Consortium programs, we need to keep the associated existing bus transportation in place. With free public busing no longer available, this is particularly critical.

Finally, the support our schools receive from the MCPS Maintenance Department, including trade specialists and building service personnel, is vital to our schools. We ask for stabilized staffing of these positions to ensure a safe, well-maintained learning environment in the nine Wheaton Cluster school buildings.

The current operating budget is a solid and smart investment in our students' short-term future and success in the classroom. They deserve no less than those fortunate enough to have preceded them during sturdier economic periods.

On behalf of Wheaton High School, Loiederman and Parkland Middle Schools, and Brookhaven, Harmony Hills, Sargent Shriver, Viers Mill, Weller Road, and Wheaton Woods Elementary Schools, thank you for your consideration of our collective concerns.