
Walt Whitman High School
Thomas W. Pyle Middle School

Bannockburn Elementary School
Bethesda Elementary School (shared)
Bradley Hills Elementary School
Burning Tree Elementary School
Carderock Springs Elementary School
Wood Acres Elementary School

FY 2012 Operating Budget Testimony

Whitman Cluster

January 19, 2011

Good evening, President Barclay, Vice President Brandman, Distinguished Members of the Board of Education and Dr. Weast. My name is Jean Schlesinger and with me tonight are my Whitman Cluster Co-Coordinator, Deborah Goldman and Keith Parsky, as well as many parents and PTA leaders from the Whitman Cluster. I would like to begin by thanking you for your efforts to balance and limit the impact of cuts, made last year, on students in the classroom setting.

My testimony this evening will be very focused. We stand behind 100% the MCCPTA Operating Budget Priorities (attached) and we urge that you fund the priorities set forth therein. Three of these funding priorities are particularly important to the Whitman Cluster.

First, we urge no further increases to class size. Across the County, we have seen the negative impact of increasing class size by one. Just by way of example, *both* kindergarten classes at Bannockburn Elementary have 27 students, placing them both one over the new guideline and making them the largest kindergarten classes in

our County. Clearly, these guidelines are neither caps nor ceilings, as both kindergarten classes exceed the new level that was set. The lack of a teacher pool to provide the teacher needed to bring class sizes within the new guidelines, and the inability of MCPS to provide additional support – of any kind, not even a paraeducator for an hour and a half, sadly demonstrate the negative impact already being felt in the classroom.

The consequences for students, teachers and parents in these classes are real and immediate. The opportunity for each student to learn and succeed is diminished as the potential for distraction increases with 27 five year olds in one classroom. The demand on teachers to engage, teach and enable each child to meet benchmarks is extraordinary at these numbers. For example, it is exceedingly difficult for classroom teachers to meet with small reading groups on a consistent basis, given the wide range of reading abilities among kindergarten students. The burden on many single and dual working parents to spend more time at home reinforcing and reteaching also cannot be understated. What would happen if class sizes were increased again by one, or more? Will kindergarten classes swell to 28, 29 or even 30 students?

At the high school level, class sizes, in some instances, literally exceed the space available. Art classes, for example, are so overcrowded that students do not have a desk, or countertop on which to work. In the interest of students, teachers and parents, we urge no further increase to class size.¹

¹ There are also concerns about class minimums and class cancellations at the high school level, particularly where a course of studies is interrupted. The impact of cancellations at the high school level should be carefully considered.

Second, given the impact of class size increases across our county, it is imperative that there be no further reduction of staff development, paraeducators, reading or ESOL teachers. Last week alone, five new ESOL students registered at Whitman. ESOL staff is essential to enable new students to pass HSAs. The support provided by instructional staff is critical to support learning with larger class sizes.

Third, as MCPS rolls out the integrated curriculum in our grade schools, and continues to implement the new advanced middle school courses, we urge that adequate staff development, materials and supporting technology be provided. Staff development teachers are essential to implement new curriculum at all schools. Considerations must be made for smaller schools, like Carderock Springs ES, that do not have a full time staff development teacher. Further, training must be done in a way that does not pull teachers from the classroom during instructional time.

In closing, we support the principle of Maintenance of Effort, and we will continue actively to pursue advocacy efforts at the county and state level to press for education funding. We ask that your ultimate budget decisions reflect the priorities of MCCPTA, the voice for 50,000 plus parents and teachers across our County. We also ask that when you reach the stage of deciding what cuts will be made, that the parent community – through the participation of MCCPTA – will have a meaningful voice.

We wish you well in the challenging months ahead. Thank you for listening.

Attachment