

**TESTIMONY**  
**Before the Board of Education**  
**On the FY2012 Operating Budget**  
January 19, 2011

Wootton High School Cluster

Wootton H.S.; Cabin John M.S.; Robert Frost M.S.; Cold Spring E.S.;  
Dufief E.S.; Fallsmead E.S.; Lakewood E.S.; Stone Mill E.S.; Travilah E.S.

Richard S. Edelman, Co-Cluster Coordinator

1. Good evening. I am Richard Edelman, a Co-Cluster Coordinator for the Wootton Cluster.

2. We want to thank the members of the Board, our administrators, teachers and staff for their time and commitment to making our school system the high quality system that it is. And we appreciate everyone's efforts to maintain that level of quality for our current and incoming students in this difficult environment.

3. For parents in the Wootton Cluster, high quality public education is generally about the highest priority they have for County government. Our Cluster has consistently supported efforts to improve our schools, increase educational opportunity throughout the County, and set higher goals for all our students. For so many, the quality of the schools is why they moved to the County and to our Cluster.

4. Our ability to maintain that quality of education is being tested. The cuts made for this year had a real impact. As examples: Lakewood has 27 kids in its kindergarten classes and DuFief has 26; Stone Mill's second grade classes have 28 and 29 students, DuFief has a grade 4/5 split class. Wootton lost 5 full-time teachers and two program positions, so this year classes of 32-34 students are common at Wootton.

Our administrators, teachers and staff have done the best they can to maintain quality in this environment. But let's not kid ourselves; the cuts already made have had an impact and further cuts will have even more of an impact. We cannot expect to maintain this school system just by dedication and hard work of everyone involved.

5. In consideration of the cuts already made, but cognizant of the economic situation, we endorse the Superintendent's proposed operating budget. Such a proposal is consistent with the Board's obligations, and we agree that it is the right thing to do.

6. That said, we heard County officials say the Board had better have a Plan B. We believe that the Board should now be considering and discussing alternatives, assuming the budget is funded at less than maintenance of effort. In that regard we endorse the MCCPTA statement of Operating Budget priorities. Beyond that we can't be specific because so much is unknown. What I can say in broad terms is that our Cluster believes that classroom instruction-- teachers and classroom aides-- is the highest priority; followed by basically safe and healthy school environments. Everything else is secondary.

7. We also want to respond to those who argue that school funding is too high because about 75% of the households do not currently have children in the schools. But all County residents benefit from appropriate funding of our schools, regardless of whether they have children presently attending school. Businesses locate here and remain here because of our schools; they are an economic engine for the County. And the high quality of our schools has supported the values of homes across our County, including homes of persons who do not currently have children in school.

8. Furthermore, many of the households that do not currently have children in school once had children who attended our schools, or will have children in our schools. The present cost of 13 years of school is about \$113,000 per pupil. A household with one child does not pay the cost of education of that child with 13 years of taxes; households with two or more children certainly do not pay for the cost of their education over the period those children are in school.

Additionally, the percentages of households with children in the school system does not measure the actual contribution of revenue to the County. We believe that the 25% of households with school children contribute well more than 25% of the County's revenue.

It is a fallacy to suggest that there are many households that are being unfairly asked to support our schools. We all know this, but we will need to make these points outside the schools community.

9. Finally, I want to respond to those who have suggested that the County's financial problems are the fault of its employees. Those problems had many causes that County employees had nothing to do with.

Additionally, pay increases have been driven by many factors other than employee pressure. We as parents, and the federal and state governments have been demanding more and more from our teachers; the job has become much harder; and there is national and state pressure for higher standards and more accountability. Additionally, in the the last decade there were forecasts of teacher shortages; and teacher compensation did not compare well to private sector professional jobs. As for benefits, many local governments sought to avoid pay increases and offered benefits instead.

10. The New York Times article prominently referenced at the Operating Budget forum regarding tensions over public employee compensation in New Jersey stated "A raft of recent studies found that public salaries, even with benefits included, are equivalent to or lag slightly behind those of private sector workers. The Manhattan Institute, which is not terribly sympathetic to unions, studied New Jersey and concluded that teachers earned wages roughly comparable to people in the private sector with a similar education."

11. All of that said, in tight economic times County employees are going to have to participate in the discussion of how to get out of this hole (as they have been doing for several years). This may mean more concessions, just as private sector employees have had to make concessions when the companies that employ them were in trouble. While changes in employee costs will be part of the solution for the County's fiscal problems, there is a difference between debating what the County can afford, and charging that the employees are overpaid and have leveraged political power to achieve excessive pay.

12. And when some demonize the employees and their representatives, we should remember that those employees are the same people who we value for their dedication to our children and who have helped produce this much admired school system. We know that the Board recognizes this; everyone else involved in this process should too. This discussion should proceed with due respect for all involved.