

# Northwest Cluster

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## Northwest High School

Kingsview Middle School

Lakelands Park Middle School

Roberto Clemente Middle School

Clopper Mill Elementary School

Darnestown Elementary School

Diamond Elementary School

Germantown Elementary School

Great Seneca Creek Elementary School

Ronald McNair Elementary School

Spark M. Matsunaga Elementary School

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## FY 2013 Operating Budget Testimony to the Board of Education January 11, 2012

Good evening Dr. Starr, President Brandman and Board of Education Members. My name is Beth Kennington and I am one of the Northwest Cluster Coordinators.

Our county is once again facing an extremely difficult budget cycle. Property values, and thus tax revenues, continue to decline. In this adverse fiscal climate we must prioritize funding decisions based on what we hope will produce the best outcomes for our children. They have only one-shot at an education. As fellow taxpayers, we request that you continue to identify and fund fiscally responsible solutions that will maximize academic achievement for our students, while assuring they are safe in their learning environments.

A New York Times article published last Friday stated that according to a new study which tracked 2.5 million students over 20 years:

[T]eachers who help raise their students' standardized-test scores seem to have a wide-ranging, lasting positive effect on those students' lives beyond academics, including lower teenage-pregnancy rates and greater college matriculation and adult earnings.

In the FY13 Operating budget, we place the greatest priority on maintaining staffing at the highest possible levels across our county schools. Our human resources are our greatest resources. It was a prospective teacher interviewing for a position with MCPS who said, "Give me a carpet square and a student and I can teach him. Everything else is just icing on the cake."

The Northwest Cluster fully supports Dr. Starr's recommended Operating Budget. The Cluster's top priority is to restore Staff Development Teacher positions at all schools to a 1.0 FTE allocation. It has been widely agreed that schools with a .4 allocation are **unable to perform staff development** because they must devote their time to tasks made a part of their position requirements, unrelated to staff development. MCPS has hired many new teachers who are not receiving staff development. That's not to say you're not hiring quality teachers, it's just an

attempt to refocus our mission on training those terrific teachers the MCPS way. Our staff faces new challenges in the classroom every day; therefore, all staff *requires* staff development in order to be successful. This cut has hurt the classroom more than any other cut sustained in the past several budget cycles. Staff Development allocations **MUST** be restored to no less than a 1.0.

Our elementary schools were instructed to cut .5 in allocations in staff development, counseling, media assistant, reading specialist or other position. No matter where the cut was taken, those schools need those hours to be restored in the current budget cycle. These positions are central to student learning. Reading specialists alone are in the forefront of the successful deployment of Key 1 – Advanced Reading in K-2<sup>nd</sup> grade and Key 2 – Advanced Reading on the MSA in grades 3-8.

Our cluster appreciates the technology provisions that we have been given, however, technological inequities still exist among schools in our cluster. Our schools face wide variations in technological learning environments - whether lacking ELMO projectors or Prometheans. We ask you this: How can our schools effectively implement and monitor implementation of the curriculum and share innovative learning processes when teaching amenities vary so broadly from one classroom to the next? Technology differentiation must be minimized and eventually eliminated during our children's one-shot at a public education.

Maintenance of Effort is an important law to our county. We all agree that modifications need to be made in order to allow taxpayers the benefits in keeping with the spirit of this law without being overly punitive in lean times. The waiver process may require modification, but the intent of this law does not. Increases in per-pupil education funding are what helped Maryland to achieve and to maintain its status as national leader in public education. Rebasng that per pupil funding at substantially lower values than the previous year can only diminish each student's chances at success in their K-12 careers and college admission opportunities.

The following are the Northwest Cluster's operating budget priorities in fiscal year 2013 in order of importance:

### **Restore Staff Development Allocations to 1.0 | Restore Other .5 Cuts**

Staff Development teachers are critical to maintaining the standard of excellence across all staff levels and serve as a collegiate support in staff training. This fact is supported by the study reported in the *New York Times* just a few days ago<sup>1</sup>. Reading specialists, counselors and media assistants are also critical to college readiness. Staff members in these positions are uniquely qualified and are vital to the success of our students. The Northwest Cluster supports Dr. Starr's recommendation to maximize budget funding for Professional development and to help guide our leaders toward the academic excellence goal line.

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<sup>1</sup> See "[Big Study Links Good Teachers to Lasting Gain](#)," Annie Lowery, *New York Times*, January 6, 2012.

## **Grant Cost of Living Adjustments**

Each year that our teachers provide an education to more students with less money is nothing short of a miracle. Doing the same with their personal expenses, while asking them to do more with less professional expenses is tragic. COLAs need to be granted in this budget cycle.

## **Technology**

Technology equipment must be made equally available to all schools whether through TechMod, school modernization, new school construction or none of the above in order to *level the technological playing field*. Promethean boards and/or ELMO projectors are needed in every classroom of every one of our schools - especially in our cluster's older elementaries like Germantown, Clopper Mill, Darnestown and Diamond. The Cluster supports utilization of operating budget funds in order to remain *technologically and academically competitive* with other County schools and to reduce the variability of performance when implementing Curriculum 2.0.

Thank you for striving to do what is necessary to maintain the highest level of academic achievement for the children in our schools, even during fiscal crises.

Respectfully submitted by,

*Beth Kennington and Sarah Kessler*  
*2011-2012 Northwest Cluster Coordinators*