

NORTHWOOD CLUSTER TESTIMONY
FY 12 - 13 OPERATING BUDGET to the BOARD OF EDUCATION

Good Evening. My name is Stephanie Helsing and I am proud to be representing the Northwood Cluster of the Down County Consortium. First, the Cluster would like to acknowledge its appreciation for the MOE budget put forth by Superintendent Joshua P. Starr. Even in these tough economic times, Dr. Starr's proposed budget reflects his commitment to the core value of our school system to "do whatever it takes to ensure that every child- regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, language proficiency, or disability - learns and succeeds" and is good for the students, employees, schools and Montgomery County as a whole. The proposed budget protects the classroom from further cuts as well as no reductions to school-based staff. We also want to thank the Board Of Education for what you have done thus far, in this fiscally challenging time, to advocate for and support the children of MCPS by allowing us to offer the highest quality education that we can for each child in Montgomery County.

Having said that, the Northwood Cluster would like to highlight the fact that this budget does contain \$8.1 million in efficiencies and reductions, and that this is on top of the \$430 million in reductions that have been made since FY 2009. As you know during this period of time, student enrollment increased dramatically, and the percentages of students living at, or near poverty level and needing language services have risen to unprecedented levels in Montgomery County. The combination of continued cuts and heightened needs is simply not sustainable.

No where are these shifts more noticeable than in the DCC. I would like to take this opportunity to remind the Board that it is imperative to recognize that the DCC is a unique consortium of schools filled with a unique set of economic, demographic and academic characteristics. Our concern remains that, despite these many challenges, this budget holds the local per pupil funding level at the reduced level set by the County Council earlier this year. Ideally we would like to get beyond these low fiscal bench marks and see vital academic supports for our students fully funded. Board of Education support for an MOE budget can ensure that we continue to meet the MCPS framework for equity and excellence through the Seven Keys to College Readiness. As others in the DCC have pointed out in their testimonies, equity leads to excellence, and that excellence raises expectations of academic success for all students across the board. This type of support needs to continue! We can't continue to allow the predictability of student outcomes based on race, ethnicity or socioeconomic factors, and in these challenging times it is more important than ever to provide a rigorous and rewarding, 21st century education to each and every child in Montgomery County.

Over the last three budget cycles, initiatives and programs that students and parents have appreciated and depended on have either been cut drastically or eliminated entirely. This is in addition to the significant loss of ESOL positions, focus teachers, and academic intervention teachers that support gifted students, on grade level students and students performing below grade level. Previous cuts have already greatly affected administrators, teachers and students in our down county schools, but we can ensure the success of all of our students by maintaining academic intervention (AI) teachers, focus teachers in elementary schools, special programs that allow for personal growth, intellectual growth and greater academic exposure and by continuing to provide transportation for specialized and immersion programs. These vital

positions provide the direct instruction, support and academic exposure many students in the DCC need to help them meet AYP, pass HSA's, pass classes they might otherwise fail and eventually to graduate.

The Following are examples of how these cuts directly impact schools in the DCC:

In the past, support staff allocation has allowed Northwood High school (NHS) to increase ACT/SAT participation and scores, as well as increase participation in AP classes with additional support classes for first-time takers. Even with these supports, like many schools in the DCC, NHS still struggles with eligibility rates with just under 60% of the students meeting the 2.0 GPA eligibility criterions. Imagine what those numbers will look like without intervention and support.

Silver Spring International Middle School (SSI) has been able to allocate its AI teachers to teach double blocks of reading and math instruction to students performing below grade level. They have also had success in lowering their ineligibility rates, which in turn helps the ineligibility rates at Northwood and Blair High School. Removal of this staffing would most assuredly, send these ineligibility rates up again impacting many schools.

Sligo Middle School (SMS) continues to struggle with high ineligibility rates and has used its allocations to reduce class size in co-teaching classes, teaching using Fast Math and Read 180 to students.

Highland View (HVES), Forest Knolls (FKES) and Sligo Creek (SCES) are MCPS focus elementary schools, while Kemp Mill (KMES), Arcola (AES) and Glen Haven (GHES) are Title 1 schools. Each of the focus schools has less than 1 FTE focus teacher allocation. All 3 of the focus schools use these allocations for direct intervention to students performing below grade level in reading and math. Please continue to support our Reading and Math Specialists and the programs they teach. All our students need to be proficient and advanced in these fields. In addition, our Title I schools need continued support for ELO (Extended Learning Opportunities) in the summer and commitment to support full day Head Start and Pre-Kindergarten for our children.

Special Programs teachers in various Northwood Cluster Schools provide a myriad of learning opportunities and experiences for students and at the same time help to close the achievement gap. Reducing these programs would impact Forrest Knolls' communication magnet program, Sligo Creek's French Immersion Coordinator position, Silver Spring International's MYP Coordinator position and Northwood's signature program heads and coordinator positions. There are simply no more cuts that can be made to any of these programs! These cuts particularly impede Northwood's ability to provide classes, programs, internships, and partnerships with the greater community that enrich and promote the academies.

Beyond academic intervention, special programs, and focus teachers, the Cluster continues to support transportation to magnet programs and immersion programs. To do anything less denies access to all students in the county and draws an eligibility line based on family income and ability to get themselves to and from school.

While the Northwood cluster is aware of the challenges being faced by the BOE, we would also like to advocate once again for a new staffing allocation formula based on school educational load, size, socioeconomic make-up and

demographics in which to allocate all AI and focus teaching positions. The Board needs to take into account the unique needs of smaller schools, as a number of the Northwood cluster schools are more adversely impacted by the across the board, formulaic cuts based on an equality assumption that simply does not exist. This is particularly true for HVES as well as SCES.

As you can see it will be impossible for the Northwood Cluster to reach higher AYP goals with less than we already have and so the Northwood Cluster's priorities are to maintain, at minimum, the current levels of academic intervention, special programming, and focus teachers in each school which will allow us to maintain AYP standards, continue to close the achievement gap, increase eligibility rates, and achieve the MCPS Seven Keys to College Readiness. The cluster needs the Board to understand that the budget cuts needed CAN'T directly impact our children any more than previous cuts have done. We need to work together to make sure that this does not happen. In closing, I would once again like to state that we appreciate the Superintendent's and the Board Of Educations measured consideration of existing resources to achieve these vital academic goals. Thank you for your consideration.