

Seneca Valley Cluster

Testimony before the Board of Education on the Superintendent's Recommended FY 2013 Operating Budget

The Seneca Valley Cluster, in Germantown, is comprised of Seneca Valley High School, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School, Roberto Clemente Middle School, Lake Seneca Elementary School, S. Christa McAuliffe Elementary School, Dr. Sally K. Ride Elementary School and Waters Landing Elementary School.

We would like to ask that the board approve the Superintendent's Recommended Operating Budget for FY2013 as it has been presented.

This is the fourth straight year that MCPS and Montgomery County have been faced with decreased revenues and increased enrollments. While we recognize the austerity in this budget we are also very cognizant of the role the County Council plays in June as the budget is finalized. With this in mind, we have identified several key facets of the proposed budget that our cluster schools, parents and leadership view as vital.

Staff Development

As we have mentioned before - high-performing teachers are the key to high-performing students. As a cluster we believe that Staff Development should be looked upon as the most important dollar for dollar expenditure. If the Superintendent expects all employees to be in a professional learning community by the end of the summer then we are going to need many more full time staff development teachers to do this effectively and efficiently.

Seneca Valley High School will graduate this spring its first students with International Baccalaureate Diplomas. While the IB program is expected to transform the academic footprint of the Seneca Valley Cluster over the coming years we must not forget that Seneca Valley High School also has a very successful, internationally recognized Academies program. For both of these programs to continue on their successful paths we need to place an emphasis on Staff Development and Staff Development teachers specifically. Over the past three years we have already lost crucial staff development resources and to lose any more of these supports will be detrimental to our staff, to our students and most of all to our IB and Academies programs.

At Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School we still do not have the Middle Years Programme to help us prepare our students for the rigors of IB. This lack of support

places a premium on our Staff Development personnel as they attempt to do more with less. MLK cannot afford to lose a single hour of Staff Development resources if our students are going to be properly prepared for high school.

With the rollout of Curriculum 2.0 to all of our elementary schools we are concerned that any reduction in Staff Development will be detrimental to a successful program implementation. This cannot be emphasized enough. We are changing the way we are teaching our students during the most formative stages of their entire life. Remember they only get one chance at this. If we get this wrong we have failed them. Our staff must be properly trained and supported.

Class Size

All of our elementary schools are focus schools and a premium is placed on classroom size. With our high FARM rates, large ESOL population and high mobility rate we have many students that are considered at risk and need every bit of one-on-one time we can give them. Currently all of our K-2 classrooms are at or over capacity. Any increase in class size will impact our math and reading specialist ability to help our most needy students. As a cluster we would like to see these focus school class sizes reduced to better help our at risk population in their most formative years.

Maintenance

We all know that the Seneca Valley High School Modernization has been delayed once again and we are concerned that as we wait the school will begin to fall into what we call the “black hole of disrepair”. This waiting puts a premium on maintenance dollars to keep the school manageable. Nothing pains us more as a community than to watch our proud school crumble, peel and leak around our children, or to see their friends and community leave the Seneca Valley cluster to attend another school because they do not want their children attending a school in such disrepair.

Central Office

The Seneca Valley Cluster does not think enough is said about the help that the central office provides to our schools. The substitute time from the Office of Curriculum and Instruction has been very helpful for the teachers implementing Curriculum 2.0, the Office of Staff Development has been extremely helpful with best instructional practices at both the high school and the middle schools. The fact that there is never a delay in

request be it Math, English or Special Education supports is testament to the hard work done behind the scenes at the Central Office.

Safety

Nothing has highlighted our budget difficulties more than the trimmed down SRO program. This program change has created a “Perception is Reality” issue among our schools. There seems to be an increase in bullying at the elementary and middle school level and an increase in fighting at the high school level. We cannot afford to lose a single member of our cluster schools security staff. We must continue to provide a safe and healthy environment for our children.

While we know that we cannot have Seneca Valley High School modernized in an expedient manner and we recognize the fiscal situation facing both the county and MCPS, we must not let our schools fall into “disrepair”, forgo our staffs’ development, and most of all compromise the health and safety of our children.

We support the MCCPTA Budget Priorities and wish the Board “good luck” in their efforts to pass this budget.