

MCPS Operating Budget Testimony

FY 2013

On behalf of Sherwood Cluster

Good evening Dr. Starr, Board Members, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Virginia Twombly and I am a co-cluster coordinator along with Tina Velazquez for the Sherwood Cluster. We are very appreciative of the Superintendent's recommended budget, which seems to make every effort to work within the constraints of these difficult economic times. It is obvious that a lot of work went into this budget and we thank you for putting the best interest of our students at the forefront of your decisions every day. We agree with, and add our support to, the comments made by Kristen Tribble, from MCCPTA, and the budget priorities voted on by the MCCPTA delegates. The Sherwood Cluster is particularly grateful that the recommended operating budget is not proposing any reductions to school-based staff.

As cluster coordinators, Tina and I share information between schools and parents – elementary schools to middle schools to high schools and back. Tonight, I want to share with you concerns and issues from the schools, and how the parents are feeling about the impact felt in the classrooms from last year's staffing cuts.

The loss of counselors at the high school, middle school and elementary school level has had the most significant and negative impact on the children in our community. We beg of you to find the resources needed to restore even some of the counselor hours that had been cut. The loss of counselors at Rosa Parks and Farquhar has had noticeably detrimental effects. We need the additional staff to address the academic and socio-emotional needs of the students. There is an amazing range of issues that 11-14 year olds face. They are changing physically, emotionally, and intellectually. These middle school kids today are trying to form their own identities and figure out who they are, while facing unprecedented information overload from technology – internet, cell phones, social media, etc. Our students desperately need guidance from qualified and trained staff about coping mechanisms because these challenges are definitely impacting their academic and social success.

There is a specific need at the elementary level as well to restore the 4 core positions: counselor, staff development teacher, reading specialist and media specialist. These roles provide the foundation upon which the rest of the school functions. It may be that many parents are not aware of how vital they are and because of that, the protests aren't as loud as when classroom teachers get cut. Please listen – we are protesting the loss of these positions!

Farquhar is also concerned with the cuts to their Alternative I allocation, which provides badly needed support for students who lack academic, organizational and social skills, but who are not part of the special education program. The cluster staff and students are certainly feeling the

effects of reduced staffing in Informational Technology with more frequent computer and technology “glitches” interrupting and limiting the school program.

Parents have reported that the increase in class size has resulted in noticeably more crowded classrooms. Because there is so much less room, there is more touching and poking, and discipline problems. Many parents feel that with the larger classes, teachers and students have less face to face time. Consequently, teachers don’t realize content hasn’t been truly comprehended and mastered until the final assessment. At that point, it is too late and the curriculum demands the class move on. The staff at our schools is phenomenal – a fact well known to this Board of Education and, of course, to Dr. Starr. But there is a limit on how much we can demand of our staff. It is not fair for fewer instructional assistants, teachers, counselors, and administrators to work longer hours and still be held to the same, or higher, expectations as when more people were assigned to the same task. Fewer people are expected to accomplish more with less.

Our message is loud and clear: the Sherwood Cluster is at a “bare-bones” staffing level. Every school is being stretched to the limit. Thank you so much for recommending no more staffing cuts at our school but please, as soon as possible, restore the core positions in our schools that we have lost! In conclusion, thank you for listening and taking note of the specific concerns and priorities of our parents and schools. Be assured we will be with you in front of the County Council in April when we advocate full funding for this budget.

Sincerely,

Virginia Twombly and Tina Velazquez

Co-cluster Coordinators

Sherwood Cluster