

Watkins Mill Cluster
Watkins Mill High School.
Montgomery Village Middle School; Neelsville Middle School
South Lake ES; Stedwick ES; Watkins Mill ES; Whetstone ES

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The Watkins Mill Cluster fully supports the Operating Budget testimony delivered by MCCPTA President Kristin Tribble, and we thank her for her leadership as we all work to advocate during these difficult fiscal times. Furthermore, our cluster supports the priorities in MCCPTA's Operating Budget Priorities Resolution, and we urge the Board of Education to be diligent in protecting these items as tough budget decisions are made.

This year is an especially difficult one to be advocating for our needs given the dire budget climate. So when you are making the tough decisions on where and how these precious, limited funds will be spent, we'd like you to consider the needs of students like those in our cluster – those who are often the least fortunate and whose parents lack the resources to provide them with the extra support they require.

In the Watkins Mill cluster, our most significant concerns are staff development for the new curriculum, lunch/recess aides, and the loss of staffing. Our cluster continues to experience some of the highest rates in the county for mobility, ESOL, and FARMS. At WMHS, the FARMS rate is 42.6% and mobility is 16.5%; collectively at our elementary schools, the FARMS are over 50%, ESOL is over 28% and mobility over 16%. In spite of these high rates, our schools have been very successful. The continued success our schools have achieved becomes dependent upon the presence of the personnel necessary to support students working with these challenges.

Watkins Mill Elementary recently lost Title I status and it has become difficult to provide the support needed for the students because of the loss of funding. Another major concern in our cluster is staff development for the new Curriculum 2.0. During the school year, it has been a challenge for staff to adapt with very little staff development time or training offered to support the change to the new curriculum. The curriculum is online, and the computers are often slow, due to limitations of network speed, the curriculum needs to be available through other media. Also, not having a good working knowledge of the changes from lack of training and limited use has been stressful for staff. This year's second grade classes are the

Christopher Columbus's of the new curriculum. Unfortunately their discovery of the new curriculum is happening at the same time their teachers are learning what it is to teach the new curriculum.

Another issue is limited funding for lunch and recess aides. For example, one of our schools only has two staff members overseeing 100 children during lunch and recess, making it difficult to ensure their safety and well-being. Our schools are requesting increased lunch and recess aide time.

Our other concern is in reference to special education. Watkins Mill Elementary currently has four SBLC classes, the current staffing of these classes does not allow for the school to effectively meet the IEP goals of all of these children in need. Additional staff is needed to help with interventions, assistance in math and reading, and data collection. Currently, staff is stretched and has to occasionally be pulled from other positions within the school to assist with problems that occur in these classes affecting other programs as well.

At Watkins Mill High School, we are experiencing a drop in projected enrollment to less than 1,500, but it is pivotal to maintain current administrative and security staff to continue to ensure the safety and well being of our students. On a separate note, the IB program is flourishing and is the cornerstone of the instructional program, with great promise for the future. As all of you are aware, WMHS has been extremely successful in creating a very strong IB program. One of the dilemmas in running a successful IB program is offering the full pathway of courses that allows students to earn their IB diploma in two years.

Often, staffing needs of the IB program are not met by the typical enrollment-driven staffing formula, as there is often a need to run multiple sections of classes that may operate below capacity. For example, if there are 35 students in the IB Diploma Program in 11th grade, all of whom require certain courses, the school is faced with the dilemma of running a single class of 35, or two sections with an average class size of 17.5. If too many of the "singletons" are in the schedule, there are inevitably class period conflicts that result in students not being able to take the classes they need. This then implores the school to offer the second section with an average size of 17.5, which is not factored into the staffing formula.

The school was able to make things work by allowing other classes to operate at capacity, and by taking advantage of specialized staffing such as the IB coordinator and academic intervention teachers. However, if there were any further staffing cuts in class size, or to support positions like academic intervention in this budget, it would be devastating to the IB program and potentially result in students not being able to enroll in all of the courses they need to complete their IB diploma. We were pleased that in last year's operating budget, we

didn't incur any staffing reductions and are asking that you continue to maintain staffing formulas to support the IB and career programs at Watkins Mill. Any changes in staffing severely impact these programs or put them at risk of elimination when there are enrollment fluctuations.

And, last but not least, our IB program would thrive if we had a Middle Years Program at a feeder middle school. We have been advocating for this for the past five years. Every high school IB program that preceded ours already has a Middle Years Program. Each of the other Middle Years Programs is at a "down county" school. In fact, of the 15 middle schools with special programs of *any* kind (magnet, immersion, Middle Years, etc), only two are in schools that could be considered "upcounty": Roberto Clemente MS (Upcounty Center for the Highly Gifted) and Gaithersburg MS (French Immersion).

We are painfully aware that there is no funding for this, but we hope that when our budget situation improves, the school board will place this among the top of its priorities.

Even though I know it is not necessary, given your commitment to ALL children in Montgomery County, I will ask you to please remember the least fortunate students throughout the county as you deliberate the budget, those students whose parents won't be able to pick up the slack as funding is cut. I wish you luck, and I thank you for listening.