

Testimony to the Montgomery County Council

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MCCPTA Blair Cluster - part of the Downcounty Consortium comprising 20% of MCPS students and the Blair, Einstein, Northwood, Kennedy, and Wheaton Clusters

Speaker: Susan Fleck, Blair Cluster Co-Coordinator

April 16, 2007

1. Estimados oficiales del condado de Montgomery, me es grato dirigirme a ustedes para rogarles que consideren aumentar el presupuesto de las escuelas publicas al nivel pedido por Dr. Weast. No hay aspiración mas importante que invertir en el futuro de nuestros hijos.

(Translation: Esteemed Montgomery County officials, I am pleased to speak with you to request that you consider increasing the public school budget to the requested level. There is no more important goal than investing in the future of our children.)

2. My name is Susan Fleck. I am one of the MCCPTA Blair Cluster coordinators, and the parent of a fourth grader at Piney Branch Elementary School. I am here tonight to speak on behalf of the more than **9,000** students and their families in the Blair cluster, with the largest high school in the county, and one of the 5 clusters comprising the Downcounty Consortium and 20% of MCPS students.

(3. First, I want to thank you for providing PTA school communities across the county the opportunity to testify. We depend on you to make the right decisions and appreciate your willingness to listen to us. Thank you for your leadership and your commitment to quality education.)

4. The Blair cluster, in the farthest southeast corner of the county, is a true melting pot. We are proud of our variety and diversity of race, nationality, ethnicity, and income. (Across the county, Montgomery County Schools demographic balance varies widely by school, but within our cluster, almost all of our schools are a balance of brown, black, and white. A few of our schools are majority latino. Overall our students are almost a third African and African American, almost a third Latino, almost a third white, and 12 % Asian. Our diversity goes beyond these labels. Our students come from mixed-race and mixed-nationality families, adoptive families, as well as two-mom and two-dad families.)

5. We have challenges in our schools too.

- On average, 15% of our students are in ESOL classes. (Fifty-nine percent of New Hampshire Estates students are in ESOL.)
- More than half – 54% – of Blair Cluster students have been enrolled in the free lunch program – some schools have 3 out of 4 students enrolled in FARMS.
- In every one of our cluster schools mobility is in the double digits. (Six of our 13 schools above 20%, our high school at 14% and one of our elementary schools losing and gain a third of its student body each year due to mobility. Most of this movement comes from families that barely scrape by and are buffeted by economic forces beyond their control.)
- International students and children of parents without legal status valiantly try to build better lives in the shadow of detention and deportation.

Blair Cluster Schools include

East Silver Spring Elementary * Montgomery Knolls Elementary * New Hampshire Estates Elementary *
Oakview Elementary * Piney Branch Elementary * Pinecrest Elementary * Rolling Terrace Elementary *
Sligo Creek Elementary * Takoma Park Elementary
Eastern Middle * Silver Spring International Middle * Takoma Park Middle
Montgomery Blair High School

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6. I am here to ask you to reconsider County Executive Leggett's suggested reduction of 20 million dollars to the proposed MCPS budget. If you think about it, this is small change that makes a difference. 20 million dollars, divided by 138 thousand students, divided by 10 months of the school year, divided by 30 days in a month. That's just under 50 cents a day.

7. Small change has a big impact. 50 cents a day (or \$150 per student per year) is a necessary part of the equation that can close the academic achievement gap. There should be no reason that racial, income, or nationality differences affect academic outcomes – yet they continue to do so.

8. Let's see how 50 cents a day is important to address the challenge of assuring achievement in the Blair Cluster.

- (Using **Long term substitute teachers** to provide a tenth of the reduction – 2 million dollars – and cutting **workforce development** by half to create a 9.2 million dollar reduction in the proposed MCPS budget.
 - High quality teachers and parent involvement close the achievement gap. Principals can not be as selective hiring substitute teachers. Limiting workforce development makes MCPS less competitive in recruiting teachers, and restricting diversity training of staff pushes parents out of schools instead of pulling them in.)
- Phasing in **high school initiatives**. A 900,000 dollar reduction.
 - The obligatory High School Assessments for the class of 2009 are soon upon us. About a fourth of Blair students have less than a 2.0 GPA. How will they graduate without extra support for these initiatives?
 - The Downcounty Consortium is based on the academy model – more resources are needed to create successful small learning communities in our 5 large high schools.
 - Blair high school has 241.6 students per counselor - How do they deal with truancy, ineligibility, drop-outs, pregnancies, and college applications, let alone scheduling!
- **Communications and public information** services - a million dollar reduction.
 - Ouch. Our cluster and neighboring schools have pushed for years to improve translations and communications and finally felt that this year MCPS hit its groove on translating report cards and academic information on the website, and in emailed Quicknotes in 5 foreign languages. MCPS justly deserved the Magna Award for multilingual communications they received this month.
 - Also, what would we do without Family and Community Outreach's Study Circles as a first step to involve underrepresented parents into school activities?

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- We keep asking for parent outreach coordinators in individual schools and still don't have them with the present budget! Squeezing 50 cents a day out of the budget will make it even less likely that they'll be part of regular staffing.

(9. The only point of County Executive Leggett's proposal that makes sense is the reduction in outside legal services, because MCPS can change the culture of litigation to one of cooperation by involving parents and families earlier in their decision making processes.)

(10. MCPS School Superintendent Weast has worked diligently over the past 8 years to balance equality of access with excellence. While parent advocates always find room for improvement with the bureaucracy of MCPS, and while we think that MCPS undercounts demographic projections in our area of the county due to infill development in Silver Spring and Wheaton,...)

(11. We do appreciate the leadership that Dr. Weast and his staff have shown in maintaining that fine balance of closing the gap and raising the bar.)

(12. The MCPS budget as requested provides support for the after school buses, the after-school teacher hours in remedial support in programs like Commonweal at Piney Branch, the Read 180 curriculum at Eastern, and the bilingual parent outreach coordinators at East Silver Spring Elementary and Eastern Middle schools. It supports the Conquista tus Sueños and Study Circle programs that our cluster depends on as ways to bring underrepresented parents in to schools.)

(13. The budget requested allows for community and interagency partnerships which, with funding from the county, create a much needed safety net and social service to our youth. This includes services like the Recreation Department's support of the Blair Sports Academy – which provides sports in a supervised setting after school and academic support for students with poor grades; the Recreation Department's afterschool coordinators who oversee MCPS teachers providing numerous after school activities to our middle school students and all MCPS middle school students; the Linkages to Learning program at Rolling Terrace (and elsewhere in MCPS); the parent leadership training provided by Impact in the Schools, which has benefited 5 of 13 Blair Cluster schools and developed more diverse parent leadership in our communities and our PTAs, and the George B. Thomas learning center Saturday schools, of which one of the largest is at Blair High School serving our area of the county.)

14. Montgomery County faces a challenge that grows every year to provide all of our children with a world-class education, even as we come from all over the world. This job is getting harder, because, as Tom Friedman, author of *The World is Flat*, says, technology has

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flattened world markets. All of our students need to have an absolute advantage if we want our county, state, and country, to stay competitive.

15. Our school system must provide **choice** to savvy parents who know what their children need while also giving **voice** to parents shut out by the system who have no idea where to go to get help for their struggling student or how to get their child to college.

16. Isn't that worth an extra 50 cents a day?

Additional comments

Blair Cluster is one of the largest clusters in MCPS, and our high school is the largest in the county. Our corner of the county has not seen the degree of declines in elementary school enrollment that other areas have (see enrollment chart attached) .While creating the Downcounty Consortium to reduce overcapacity have been successful, this effort is threatened by poor physical conditions at Northwood High School, our closest sister school in the 5-cluster consortium. Northwood High School was given short shrift when it opened to alleviate overcrowding at Blair and other area high schools. If overcrowding depends on picky students' and their parents choosing one of 5 area high schools, Northwood will not be competitive and Blair will suffer the consequences.

Silver Spring International Middle School, with students in base areas of both Northwood and Montgomery Blair high schools, has insufficient staff to maintain the grounds and a neglected exterior. SSIMS reputation as a strong middle school depends not only on great programs like the International Baccalaureate, but on a well-maintained school.

We support the efforts of our neighbors in the Northwood cluster to get MCPS to improve the condition of their high school and our shared middle school. We will address these issues further in our CIP testimony.

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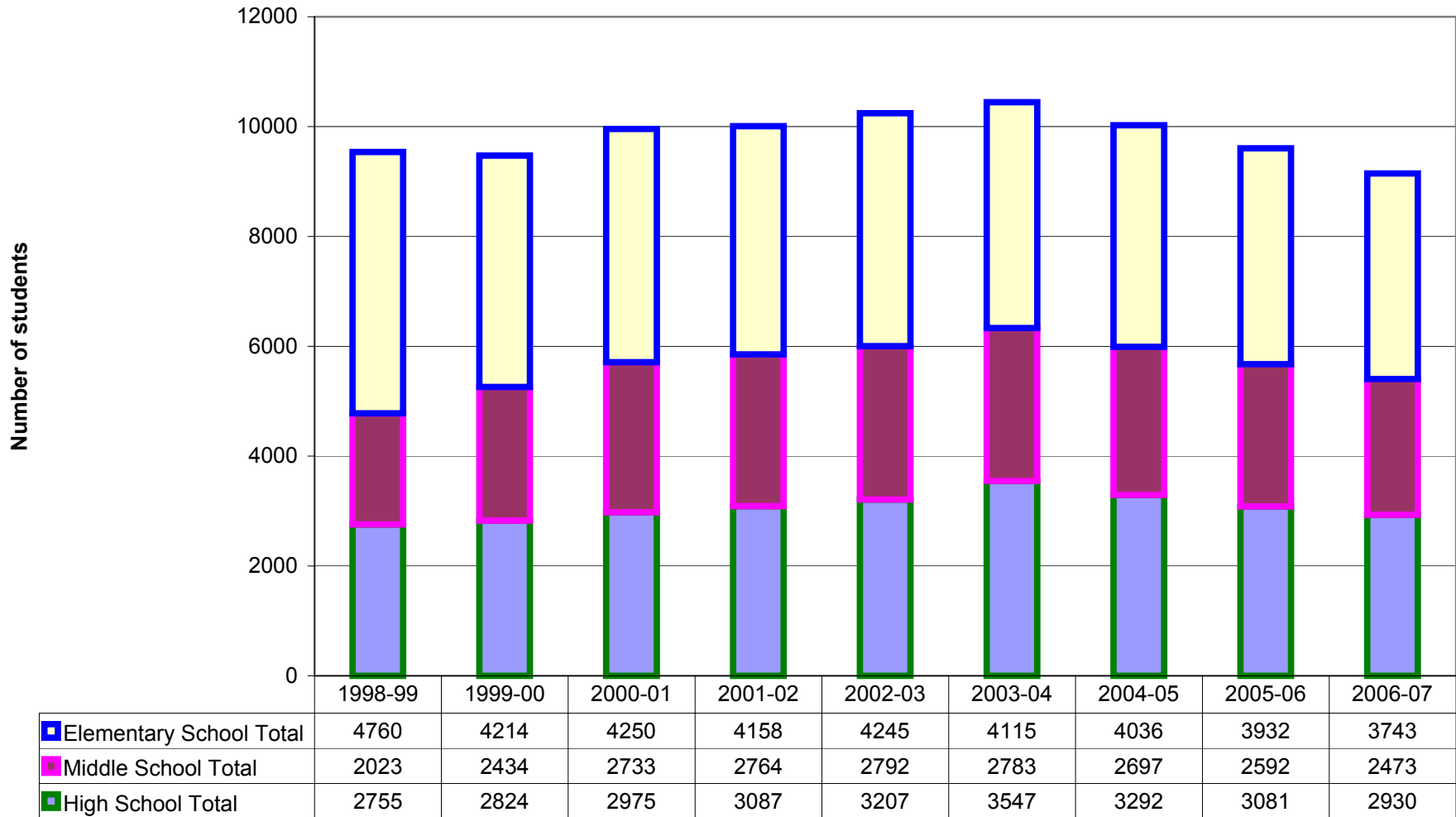
**Blair Cluster School Characteristics, 2006-07
(in percent)**

	Blair	Eastern MS	Silver Spring International MS	Takoma Park MS	Rolling Terrace ES (HS-5)	Sligo Creek ES (K-5)	Oakview ES (3-5)	Pine crest ES (3-5)	Piney Branch ES (3-5)	New Hampshire Estates ES (HS-2)	Montgomery Knolls ES (HS-2)	East Spring ES (HS-2)	Silver Park ES (K-2)	Takoma Park ES (K-2)
FARMS Ever Farms	25.7	42.9	47.8	21.8	54.4	23.5	76.4	49.2	40.5	78.7	56.1	61.0	27.1	27.1
Demographics														
AfAm	31.2	25.4	30.2	30.6	20.5	31.0	23.2	34.9	42.3	22.9	35.9	56.2	33.1	33.1
Asian	15.9	15.8	8.0	18.0	7.2	6.5	10.1	10.1	5.0	11.0	15.2	7.6	6.5	6.5
Hispanic	25.5	28.9	38.7	15.3	50.7	14.5	61.4	27.1	24.2	61.9	34.8	23.5	18.2	18.2
White	27.0	29.8	23.1	35.8	21.0	47.9	5.2	27.6	28.2	4.2	14.1	12.4	42.3	42.3
ESOL	9.3	7.1	7.6	6.6	26.6	6.6	29.2	10.6	13.7	59.2	36.4	27.1	12.7	12.7
Mobility	14.5	13.2	20.8	11.5	20.7	11.6	27.5	18.1	13.8	29.0	23.3	32.2	13.5	13.5
Suspension	11.9	11.4	16.1	11.0	1.6	0.5	3.6	3.3	1.1	0.0	0.8	0.4	0.0	0.0

**Blair Cluster School Characteristics, 2006-07
(levels)**

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No of students	2,930	822	750	901	635	619	224	343	481	394	375	256	416	416	9,146	9,146
FARMS Ever Farms	753	353	359	196	345	145	171	169	195	310	210	156	113	113	3,476	38.0%
Demographics																
AfAm	1524	446	488	356	390	194	191	206	257	333	242	172	138	138	4,937	54.0%
Asian	914	209	227	276	130	192	52	120	203	90	135	144	138	138	2,829	30.9%
Hispanic	466	130	60	162	46	40	23	35	24	43	57	19	27	27	1,132	12.4%
White	747	238	290	138	322	90	138	93	116	244	131	60	76	76	2,682	29.3%
ESOL	791	245	173	323	133	297	12	95	136	17	53	32	176	176	2,481	27.1%
Mobility	272	58	57	59	169	41	65	36	66	233	137	69	53	53	1,317	14.4%
Suspension	425	109	156	104	131	72	62	62	66	114	87	82	56	56	1,527	16.7%
Suspension	349	94	121	99	10	3	8	11	5	0	3	1	0	0	704	7.7%

**Trends in Blair Cluster Enrollment
by school type, 1998-99 thru 2006-07**



■ High School Total
 ■ Middle School Total
 ■ Elementary School Total

April 10, 2007

Montgomery County Council
County Office Building
100 Maryland Ave.
Rockville, MD 20850

RE: MCPS operating budget

Dear County Council Members:

I know you face a number of important and difficult decisions in the current tightening budget environment. I am writing to voice concern about the proposed budget cuts on Montgomery County's public schools. I have had a first hand view of the impact that some of the special programs have as President of the Eastern Middle School PTSA.

Even in a County as diverse as Montgomery County, Eastern's diversity is truly remarkable. The student body is 30% Latino, 28% white, 29% black, and 13% Asian and Pacific Islander. Two of every five students qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

The school is also home to a selective communications magnet. I recently sat on a committee that examined ways that the school can help bridge divides between students in the neighborhood and magnet programs. Improvement in all students' performances, with a special focus on non-native English speakers and their families will not only be academically beneficial, it will help the school build a greater sense of community.

In particular, I would like to call your attention to two programs. Read 180 is a wonderful course that supports gains in literacy for students reading two or more years below grade level. I have heard presentations by the dedicated and dynamic educators that teach this course at Eastern. These presentations include information about the impressive gains participants make in this program. Each semester, Eastern "graduates" students out of the program whose reading level has reached or surpassed grade level for a sustained period of time - usually at least a quarter. Many of these "graduates" have moved from a remedial program directly into gifted and talented classes, where their true intellectual level belongs. Read 180 requires small classes - 15 - to be effective, and the classroom has to be equipped with a set of five computers. Cutting staff and/or technology makes it hard to sustain these very real gains.

Eastern has a Latino Outreach position that serves as a parent liaison with our Spanish speaking community. Since I don't speak Spanish, this person has been a critical resource to the school and the PTSA. This person's time is devoted to building relationships with families who often feel marginalized by factors such as language and immigration status. Cutting staff to endanger this type of community outreach would leave students and families isolated from the school - a recipe for underachievement.

Thank you for considering the impact of budget cuts on these types of programs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peggy Sand". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Peggy Sand

April 1, 2007

Dear County Council,

Piney Branch Elementary School, like many other “downcounty” schools, lives on the edge. Only last year, we were able to exit the “improvement process” by pulling up our MSA scores, but we will have to struggle every year to hit this mark. It took every resource we have, and a huge effort from staff, parents and students, to pull those scores up. We are a school which skates above and below the Title I designation from year to year, and resources come and go with that title. Even though we are a school with a white minority, with new students arriving from around the world without English skills throughout the year, we do not have the poverty rate that would garner us badly-needed social service programs such as Linkages to Learning.

Whatever you do, please do not cut any of the resources that would disproportionately affect downcounty schools that badly need more (not less) parent outreach, social service linkages, guidance counselors, assistant principals, or resource teachers in order to function in the midst of the huge demographic changes in our area.

We also want to testify to the importance of the additions planned for both Takoma Park ES and East Silver Spring ES, which have a direct impact on our school. These are not optional projects. It is not safe or acceptable to have the entire second grade in portables at Takoma Park ES. And East Silver Spring ES must have their addition in order to relieve the overcrowding at Sligo Creek ES. Under the skilled guidance of MCPS staff and Chris Barclay, the staff and parent communities from our four schools came to a rare and happy consensus on the additions that would solve our overcrowding issues. Delaying these building projects, and the delicate realignment of school populations that will accompany them, will be agonizing and cause great distress in our communities.

Thank you for your devotion to our great county schools.

Susan Katz Miller
PTA President
Piney Branch Elementary School



Rolling Terrace PTA



The Honorable Marilyn J. Praisner,
President, Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD 20850

April 16, 2007

Dear Madam:

As a County Council representative it is sometimes difficult to balance the many needs of Montgomery County's residents, but I ask you today to please take into account the importance of supporting our school district in achieving residents' goals. As a Montgomery County resident, homeowner, taxpayer, and citizen it is important to me that we help our schools accomplish their mission to educate ALL of our students.

I have two children attending Rolling Terrace ES, a Title I school serving 650 students, most of whom are limited English speakers. Our school is their family's first step towards obtaining the American dream. We are very fortunate at Rolling Terrace because our Title I status enables us to maintain many programs that are essential to schools that have the demographics that we possess. Examples of these additional services are: Head Start, a full-time family coordinator, instructional aides, additional ESOL teachers, instructional support teachers, and a gifted and talented coordinator. The presence of this additional personnel at our school helps many children achieve the kind of academic support and enrichment that ALL of our county's children deserve.

In addition to these funds, however, we are greatly served by our partnerships with The Silver Spring Judy Center, the YMCA Linkages to Learning Program, Community Bridges Program, and IMPACT in the Schools Program from IMPACT Silver Spring. Collectively MCPS and federal funds, and our community partners offer comprehensive services to our neediest families and students. While the school does its best to meet the academic needs of our students, our additional partners address some of the socio-emotional needs that some of our students bring into our school setting. For many in our school community these extra partners means the difference between involved and informed parents and parents who are unable, overwhelmed, or intimidated to become active partners in their children's education. Many of our partners bring resources that are desperately needed in our schools—after school programs, bilingual personnel, proactive and preventive programs, and intervention programs.

Rolling Terrace ES is a school that welcomes ALL children and families and is working hard to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of the students that come through their doors, but it cannot do it alone. Educating our residents requires collaboration between county and school district resources. Please help support our efforts to make Montgomery County the best it can be for ALL its residents.

Sincerely,
Nora Illia Cartland
10029 Tenbrook Drive
Silver Spring, MD 20901



Sligo Creek Elementary School
500 Schuyler Road
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD 20850

Honorable Members of the Council:

The Sligo Creek Elementary School PTA would like to thank you for your efforts to manage the affairs of Montgomery County in a way that maintains a high quality of life for its residents. We empathize with the competing demands and difficult decisions that must be made to keep a thoughtful and balanced budget.

As you may know, our school houses the down county French immersion program as well as the neighborhood school, known as the Academy, and the Asperbeger's program. We have been told that, because of funding constraints resulting from the budget decision, we will lose our Math/Academy coordinator position for the 2007-2008 academic year. The loss of this position is a critical blow for us, because when our school was opened 8 years ago, the community was promised a signature program that would be "of equal stature and attractiveness" to the French immersion program. The signature program that MCPS and the community agreed upon was a science/math program. To lose funding for half of that signature program is a serious loss to the school and to the neighborhood parents who have worked so hard for the success of the Academy.

In addition to losing a staff position, our community is concerned that a reduced budget might affect construction scheduled to take place at nearby East Silver Spring and Takoma Park Elementary Schools. Sligo Creek is currently one of the largest elementary schools in the county. The proposed additions to Takoma and East Silver Spring will result in the re-assignment of approximately 150 Sligo Creek students to Takoma Park/Piney Branch Elementary Schools bringing our enrollment in line with other area schools.

We thank you again for your commitment to our community and our children, and we ask that you fund a budget that will fully support important programs such as the Math/Science signature program we have at Sligo Creek.

Sincerely,

Debbie Spielberg
SCES PTA President

Sara Melnick
SCES Blair Cluster Representative

April 15, 2007

Montgomery County Council
County Office Building
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD 20850

RE: MCPS Operating Budget

Dear Council Chairperson Praisner and Council members;

This letter, written on behalf of the parents of Takoma Park Middle School strongly urges the County Council to fully fund the Board of Education's operating budget. Full funding is required to meet the need for resources and programs to support high quality learning inside and outside the classroom for all children. As mentioned in the MCPS vision statement, high quality education is a fundamental right of every child.

An effective and rigorous instructional program, safe and positive school environments, well paid and trained teachers and counselors, support for ESOL and special education students, sustained community partnerships and a commitment to reducing the achievement gap are all vital to the attainment of a high quality education for all students. The proposed budget cut could jeopardize the realization of these key priorities.

Full funding of the Board of Education budget is needed to help ensure that class sizes where teachers can teach important skills like logic, rhetoric, argumentation and audience awareness. These are basic thinking skills that are vital to a high quality education. The Council is also urged to fully fund the budget to address the need for additional special education staffing to support full inclusion classes; textbooks to support the new Health curriculum, Algebra 1 initiatives, and corrective reading programs such as Read 180, and, additional counseling staff. Further, budget funds are needed to preserve music and arts programs that enrich the lives of students and cement academic instruction. Finally, it is hoped that the work being done as part of the Middle School Reform initiative and currently being piloted at five schools will continue in the future.

In closing, if MCPS is to retain its place as a nationally renowned school system it must continue to attract and maintain qualified, well trained teachers who can live and work in this county. The challenges faced by many teachers who cannot find affordable housing in the county is well documented as salaries have not kept pace with inflation.

In support of the reasons discussed above, the council is strongly urged to fully fund the Board of Education's operating budget.

Respectfully;

Yasmin Anderson-Smith

Yasmin Anderson-Smith
Co-PTA President
Takoma Park Middle School

Members of the Montgomery County Council

Please know we so very much appreciate your time and effort - trying to craft an affordable budget when there are so many competing needs is difficult at best.

The following was approved by the Blair High School PTSA in support of the MCPS budget:

We are writing on behalf of the Blair High School PTSA (of which we are co-Presidents) to urge you to pass the budget for Montgomery County Public Schools as recommended by the Board of Education and Superintendent Weast.

We are most thankful for the support the Council has provided public education in the county over the years and we know we can count on you to continue that support. But we strongly believe that if the Council adopts the County Executive's recommendation for an across-the-board cut, the programs and services most needed by Blair, and other schools with a large and diverse population, will suffer the most.

We support the superintendent's goal of closing the academic achievement gap between black and Latino students on the one hand and white and Asian students on the other. After all, Blair HS is the poster child for the challenge MCPS faces. With a "minority" population that is three fourths of the student body of 3000, virtually every ethnic group and income class in the county is represented at Blair. Our math and science magnet regularly produces a disproportionate share of Maryland's Intel scholars. Our Communications Arts Program students excel academically and produce award winning publications like the Silver Chips newspaper. At the same time, in any given semester, upwards of 1/3rd of the general student body is academically ineligible to participate in extra curricular activities because they failed to maintain a 2.0 average or failed two or more classes.

Many of Blair's students come from homes with immigrant parents who have had limited educational opportunities. They struggle to comprehend English, MCPS and the complexities of the American system of education. These students do not have the home academic support, enrichment programs, summer camp and travel opportunities that so many others in our county take for granted. With two parents working two and three jobs each, these students do not have a parent at home to assist with home work and guide their activities. Consequently, the burden for academic support and the measures necessary to close the gap falls on the school system. It is a burden MCPS is having difficulty handling even today.

We'd like to give you some examples of how Blair's students will suffer if the budget is cut:

- MCPS prohibits the academically ineligible from participating in extra curricular activities. The goal is to make parents more involved and give students an

incentive to succeed. Instead, it drives them into the arms of local gangs. The county council recognized this problem and created the Blair Sports Academy and similar academic/recreation programs at other schools focusing on children-at-risk.

We in the Blair PTSA are grateful for that action. But to make such an investment fully payoff for the county and the kids, we need bilingual (at minimum), school-based community outreach staff. Many times, it is difficult for our wonderful Blair staff to communicate with the parents of children most in need, making it difficult to build ties with those segments of the school community. If the school system's budget is cut, any hope of securing the resources needed to reach out to that significant percentage of our community is lost.

- Blair will be celebrating the 10th anniversary of its new facility next year. Every year since its opening, we've been above our 2800 student capacity – always the largest high school in Montgomery County. In the 2003-2004 school year we had 3500 students! Overcrowding and other issues resulted in one third of the freshman class of 900 academically ineligible that year. Gangs proved a powerful draw.

Parental agitation, the reopening of Northwood HS and the initiation of the Down County Consortium have all contributed to a reduction over the last three years of Blair's population. It is slated to again reach capacity in 2007-8. Many of us have our doubts, given the poor track record of MCPS' projections, and the recently opened or planned construction of over 4000 housing units in the Blair cluster. However, the real reduction to this year's 3000 kids and the hoped for reductions next year offer renewed opportunities to address the challenges of Blair's demographics.

But, rather than seizing the chance to reduce class size, and lower the absurd counselor-teacher ratio (now between 300 and 400 kids per guidance counselor) MCPS is proposing to disproportionately cut Blair's staff. If the student population goes down, the bureaucrats argue, so should staff. In reality, Blair's student-teacher ratios are skewed by the small CAP and magnet classes. Kids in honors and "on-level" classes often find themselves sharing space with 50% more students than the "class average." The students who need the most instruction and the most attention from teachers go to school for the shortest time (7 periods v. 8 for CAP and magnet) in the largest classes (30+ per period).

If MCPS cuts Blair's staff the opportunities to make significant progress on "the gap" may be lost. If the County cuts the MCPS budget, the chance to hold on to those teaching and counseling posts will most certainly be lost. Our chance to make AYP this year may also be lost.

- No place in Montgomery County is large enough to accommodate the graduations of its larger schools. And notwithstanding the rhetoric of achievement, when it came to celebrating the milestone event of high school graduation, MCPS treated the huge schools like Blair the same as the small schools like Poolesville. Amazingly, everyone got the same money to rent graduation facilities. For Blair and other large schools, the only choice was a horse arena with facilities that made it difficult for family and friends to celebrate a milestone event in their student's lives.

This year, finally, we in the Blair community, supported by PTAs across the county, succeeded in persuading the Board of Education to authorize the use of the Comcast Center for our graduation ceremonies. Compelled by the Board's action to provide a suitable venue for Blair, the superintendent, in the spirit of fairness, at last offered other large schools like Sherwood the chance to graduate in the Comcast facility. The resources to pay for that venue came out of "thin air," the same "thin air" that will be eliminated by an across the board cut. Again, it was the flexibility afforded MCPS by the Council's past wisdom in funding the school system that made it possible for the central office to finally do the right thing. Should that flexibility be eliminated, it will likely be schools like Blair that pay the price.

- There are other issues: The Down County Consortium's viability is in question. Northwood High School – like Silver Spring International before it - got a facelift not a renovation and is now exposed as woefully inadequate. Budget cuts will only exacerbate the situation and make it harder for "red zone" schools to offer what "blue zone" schools like BCC and Walter Johnson can now offer.

To sustain the momentum MCPS has achieved at the elementary level, and to address the challenges of an ethnically and economically diverse public school population, Montgomery County must continue fully funding our schools. Simply maintaining the status quo in a changing county is difficult and we must "run harder and faster" to make the substantial progress needed to maintain our standing as one of the region's pre-eminent school districts.

We ask that you consider these points and vote to sustain the requested funding for the next fiscal year. If collectively you feel you must reduce the funds, we ask that you NOT do it across the board, but offer the central office and Board of Education some guidance so they are encouraged to explore the resources committed to staff and other functions above the level of principals or consortia before looking to the school budget for savings.

Thank you again for your support of public education in our county.

Deborah Stoll and David Ottalini
Blair High School PTSA Co-Presidents