

Seneca Valley Cluster

Testimony before the Board of Education on the Superintendent's Recommended FY 2011 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 FY2011 as it has been presented.

International Baccalaureate Diploma Program

Two years ago the Seneca Valley Cluster and the John F. Kennedy Cluster were asked to do away with their very successful University of Cambridge program and switch over to the equally rigorous International Baccalaureate Diploma Program. At the end of this school year Seneca Valley High School will have completed two years of Pre-IB and will be able to offer for the first time to our FY2011 juniors a full IB diploma program.

During these two years the principals of our cluster schools have worked together to create a vertical articulation model that will best ensure that our students are prepared for the IB program from Elementary School through High School.

The IB program has become the focus of our cluster and we want more. Currently there is no middle school in the Up County area that is offering the Middle Years Programme. This program allows students in grades 6-10 to better prepare themselves for the rigors of the IB program. With Martin Luther King, Jr Middle School articulating 100% of their students to Seneca Valley High School we feel that this is the perfect place for the program.

MCPS Cuts Menu

One year ago we stood here and talked about how bleak the economic situation was and how we needed to hold the line. Well the current economic situation is bleaker and we have to hold the line tighter. When one looks over the "MCPS Cuts Menu" one can only cringe at each item.

Our cluster elementary schools are over capacity and to have an increase in class size would only exacerbate the problem. Our FARMS rates are high enough that all of the cluster schools are focus schools and the loss of even one teacher would be detrimental not only to the "at risk population" but to the school as a whole. We can not even imagine

the struggles that our elementary schools will face if they have to lose reading resource teachers, staff development teachers or media assistants.

As we have mentioned before - high-performing teachers are the key to high-performing students. These teachers are most likely the second most influential role models students will encounter other than their parents and in the case of some students they may be the only role model. In today's ever changing environment we ask our staff to keep up with technological advancements and rapidly changing teaching techniques as well as to take on increased workloads as school staffs are decreased or frozen due in this dire economic time. For these reasons alone Staff Development should be looked upon as an important dollar for dollar expenditure.

We also need to start thinking about our teachers well being and their morale. With staff cuts always looming in the background our teachers need to have their morale kept up. Their positive outlook on the situation immediately translates to the students and makes these difficult times more manageable.

We must find ways to keep our teachers positively motivated and confident about their futures here in Montgomery County.

Budget Reality

Some of us think this budget is very optimistic and we are concerned what will happen if there are some changes to the Maintenance of Effort at the state level? As you know some of our Montgomery County delegation is introducing an emergency bill in Annapolis to waive the Maintenance of Effort penalty from last year. With more counties running into Maintenance of Effort problems we are sure that Annapolis is going to try and help out the counties.

We know that Montgomery County is facing a 608 million dollar shortfall and that MCPS takes up 50% of the entire county budget. Heaven forbid if the County Council was able to pass half of the shortfall to us.

With all of this in mind what if for some reason the County Council was to say "MCPS you need to cut 4% from your budget" how do we do it? That is 88 million dollars.

Do we take this "MCPS cuts Menu" and times it by two and put 1068 people out of work? Or do we just save the programs and sink the teachers and increase class size by 5 across the board and put 1200 teachers out of work?

None of these cuts are going to be easy, but we would like see all of these cuts be as transparent as possible. We would hope that the Board would be interested in a discussion forum late in May as we have a clearer picture of the budget. So that the community at large can also weigh in on the issues and decide for themselves what is important to them and the Board does not have to do all the heavy lifting alone.