

Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster
Bethesda-Chevy Chase HS
Westland MS
Bethesda ES*Chevy Chase ES*North Chevy Chase ES
Rock Creek Forest ES*Rosemary Hills PS
Somerset ES*Westbrook ES

Testimony on the Superintendent's Recommended FY 2011 Operating Budget
January 20, 2010

Good Evening, Chairman O'Neill and members of the Board of Education. I am Joy White, co-coordinator with Craig Brown and Jack Hayes of the Bethesda Chevy Chase Cluster and am grateful to have this opportunity to share our priorities with you tonight on the 2011 Operating Budget for Montgomery County Public Schools. I would also like to thank our cluster principals and members of our community who have come here tonight.

We know the Board has some difficult decisions to make in the 2011 budget. We want you to know that we support the Superintendent's maintenance of effort request. This is an important goal to reach, as it affects the county's funding level for schools in future years.

Parents in the BCC cluster communities also want you to know that we stand behind the MCCPTA operating budget priorities. Those priorities include limiting class sizes as much as possible, maintaining our school facilities, sound curriculum development and implementation, and strong academic support for all students. Meeting these goals is important to the long term success of our children and the long-term success of our local economy. These children must be prepared to contribute to Montgomery County's future growth. Drastic education cuts now could have disastrous consequences for individual students and our whole community in the future.

We encourage you to find ways to fund paraeducators in elementary schools, special education and staff development support, strong curriculum development, and transportation for magnet and immersion programs.

The BCC Cluster values the presence of paraeducators in our cluster elementary schools. These professionals provide instructional support to our elementary level teachers at Rosemary Hills Primary School. Serving students from kindergarten through 2nd grade, Rosemary Hills educates over 630 children under the age of 8. Paraeducators are essential partners with teachers in managing this young student population, especially in helping Grade 2 students reach MCPS performance targets in reading. At Bethesda Elementary School, paraeducators are critical to the inclusion model program, supporting students with IEPs to participate in the general education setting with their peers. Paraeducators support the Home School Model and Emotional disabilities programs at Westbrook and Somerset as well and are essential to the smooth mainstreaming of these students.

In addition to finding ways to preserve funding for paraeducators, we urge you to avoid cuts in other staff positions that support students with disabilities. Academic intervention teachers and

school counselors are critical to the success all students, especially special needs students. Potential reductions reported on the MCPS website identify academic intervention positions and counselors as expenditures that are expendable. We disagree. Last week, you heard from Julia Strauss, a representative of the Commission on Children and Youth. Julia Strauss, a disabled student, will graduate from BCC this year on time, despite years of setbacks in her educational progress. Julia credits her success not only to MCPS special education and counseling staff, but also access to a nonpublic placement and related services. MCPS prides itself on the success of all students, but challenges with IEP and Edline systems complicated Julia's transition. A continuum of placements, supportive technology and enough well trained staff are essential in keeping students like Julia from falling through the cracks.

We all know that staff development support is so important to preparing our general and special education teachers to help all children succeed in school. Staff development professionals also play a key role in helping our cluster schools reduce the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students. At Westland, all 8th graders take Honors English and all 9th graders at BCC take Honors Biology—staff development professionals help teachers provide the differentiated instruction that enables students of all backgrounds to access this rigorous level of instruction.

Maintaining strong curriculum development is critical to the long-term viability of our children and the community. Middle school reform has been a priority for the BCC cluster and continues to be so. Our primary concern is that students be prepared to meet state graduation requirements when they get to high school. We need to prepare them for this by ensuring adequate rigor in our middle school programs. The BCC cluster is home to two elementary schools, Chevy Chase Elementary School and North Chevy Chase Elementary School, which both host sixth grade students. These students matriculate to Westland Middle School for 7th and 8th grade. For 2011, our cluster believes it is imperative to include these sixth graders in all middle school reform efforts, so that these students are not behind their peers when they move on to Westland in 7th grade.

The BCC Cluster is home to several special programs, including the International Baccalaureate at BCC High School and Westland Middle School, the Spanish language immersion program at Rock Creek Forest Elementary School and Westland Middle School, and the Center for the Highly Gifted at Chevy Chase Elementary School. Students across the county participate in these programs at our cluster schools. Many students would not be able to take advantage of these programs without transportation the county provides to get the kids to these schools. These special programs enrich the quality of our schools and communities. A loss of funding for special program transportation would hurt the students who do not have private transportation to get to these programs as well as the school communities at the host schools. We urge the Board to find innovative ways to continue funding transportation to these optional educational programs.

Thank you for this opportunity to share the concerns of BCC cluster families with you. We look forward to working with the Board, and with our county and state legislators, to support the budget for our schools. We appreciate the tough decisions you have before you and urge you to make the right decisions to provide for the education of all of MCPS students.