Northwest Cluster

Northwest High School

Kingsview Middle School
Lakelands Park Middle School (shared)
Roberto Clemente Middle School (shared)

Clopper Mill Elementary School
Darnestown Elementary School
Diamond Elementary School (shared)
Germantown Elementary School
Great Seneca Creek Elementary School
Ronald McNair Elementary School
Spark M. Matsunaga Elementary School

Operating Budget Testimony before the Board of Education January 13, 2010

Good Evening Dr. Weast, President O'Neill and Members of the Board of Education. I'm Susan Burkinshaw, one of the Northwest Cluster Coordinators.

Understanding that as a community we are facing the worst budget situation in our living memory, our number one request is that you prioritize your decisions based on our children's safety, educational well-being in their learning environments and health. As fellow taxpayers, we would also request that you continue to consider and incorporate environmentally and fiscally responsible solutions that will yield future cost-savings to our county and will also minimize our shared environmental footprint.

Our cluster decided to forego asking you for anything this year - although we have aging facilities in our cluster that continue to have issues with heating and ventilation, security camera systems and other maintenance items. The resounding message echoed throughout the cluster regarding the upcoming budget cycle is that we all need to do our best to maintain staffing at the highest possible levels across our county schools.

We encourage you to consider all possible alternatives to increases to the average class size and staffing cuts. We cannot underscore enough, the need for you to consider that additions to class sizes or reductions in staff impact different schools in different ways. An increase in the average class size and reduction in staffing at some of our smaller schools like Darnestown and Germantown Elementaries, already bursting at facilities' seams, would create fallen victims in Montgomery County's "budget war" of FY '11. The Northwest Cluster would like to urge you to strongly consider *creative budget reducing* solutions such as considering cutbacks in the Office of School Performance and technology updates/additions and, moreover, by dramatically cutting back or completely eliminating materials warehouse operations (approximately $5.7M) and the MCPS Communications Department ($8M). We ask why MCPS is one

of the "last ones standing" with its materials warehouse operations? Why have most of our large neighboring school systems closed or dramatically cut back their warehouse operations? It's because in today's market we have contracts and bids for the procurement of bulk pricing available to us; shipping is often affordable or waived and the vendors are willing to store and ship for us! ALL jobs and personnel are valued and are an integral part of our school system's operations. While the people in those positions have served us well, we would like for you to consider cuts to those operating expenses with the least possible impact on the classroom. Other creative solutions brought forth by our cluster include revision to the summer school schedule and elimination of summer school transportation at the middle school level. These suggested changes could save on operating costs by opening the buildings on fewer days. It is our cluster's goal to save staff positions, and to avoid losing any more.

Our support staff are more taxed and spread more thinly than ever. The number of hats worn by these *very valuable educators* can only be outdone by large capacity hat racks and hat making factories! While inclusion of the special education population has become the priority in MCPS, we cannot allow the general education, highly capable or differentiated learners of MCPS to suffer the loss of even more classroom supports. To do so would parallel elimination of the requirement to master curricular objectives. We <u>must</u> find a way to protect our future leaders' education and to continue to provide them with the world-class public education that Montgomery County Public Schools provides to our students now and will continue to provide them in the future!

Furthermore, while we understand that "everything is on the table" insofar as cuts need to be made, we would suggest that extracurricular activities continue to be provided as they clearly meet the social and physical needs that often cannot be met during the school day. We would happily look at the budget costs of extracurricular transportation, stipends, uniforms and equipment in order to save these valuable and much needed programs.

The Northwest Cluster maintains that, by executing staff cuts through attrition and maintaining other personnel positions, even with the possibility of reduced hours or furloughs, we keep morale up in the schools. Our teachers and school staff would rather have a job than not, and keeping our county employees on payroll continues tax revenue for the state and eliminates the need to pay unemployment benefits. It also keeps money in their pockets to support our local merchants and help support sales tax revenues. Let's consider creative staffing and scheduling before we eliminate invaluable human resources.

At a minimum, please maintain the staff development and counseling positions in our schools. Staff Development specialists are critical to maintaining the standard of excellence across all staff levels and serve as collegial support to staff. Counselors are also critical to our county schools while the dynamics of children's lives become increasingly complex as they grow. Staff members in

these positions are uniquely qualified and vital to the success of our school system.

The Northwest Cluster hopes that you will consider creative solutions to this budget crisis, look for operational savings in underutilized programs to help maintain the budget to staff positions that are critical to supporting our schools and other mission critical county safety services.

We are all learning to do without in this economy. Our own personal budgets are suffering from reduced income levels and we are all learning to tighten our belts, but cutting jobs across the board will not solve our budget crisis and may only compound it. Many of our schools can probably live with less for the near future. We urge you to please act responsibly with careful policy consideration before slashing positions in our county schools to save a dime.

NOTE: The following was submitted in writing as part of the testimony, but was not spoken due to time constraints:

We ask you whether all schools need additional technology at this juncture? Or can technology updates be postponed? Northwest High School is in dire need of additional security cameras, but I'd be willing to bet they would wait patiently on the added cameras in order to spare precious staff.

You've heard me say many times before that the Northwest Cluster is fortunate to include Great Seneca Creek Elementary, the first LEED Gold certified school in Maryland. Here we are experiencing not only the environmental benefits of a facility built with the principles of minimizing the building's environmental impact, but also the longer- term operating cost savings of being in a facility that maximizes its resource utilization. Great Seneca Creek Elementary School has seen a tremendous cost savings with its "green" design. It currently uses the least energy of any building owned by MCPS, using about ½ the energy per square foot each year compared to the average MCPS facility. GSCES costs about 18% less to operate per year than an average non-green school, with a combined water and energy savings of about $27,000 annually over a comparably-sized facility.

We encourage you to continue to evaluate this budget closely to ensure that each child educated in MCPS is safe in and around their schools, and that as a county school system we continue to promote and execute solutions with long-term cost-efficiencies and minimal environmental impact. Like you, we expect that all children in our county schools should experience equivalent learning atmospheres, even during this fiscal crisis.

Respectfully submitted by:
Susan Burkinshaw, Beth Kennington and Bob Murphy
2009-10 Northwest Cluster Coordinators