

Walter Johnson Cluster

Walter Johnson High School - North Bethesda Middle School - Tilden Middle School - Ashburton Elementary School - Farmland Elementary School - Garrett Park Elementary School - Kensington Parkwood Elementary School - Luxmanor Elementary School - Wyngate Elementary School

Good Evening President O'Neill, members of the Board of Education, and Superintendent Weast. My name is Jennifer Cope and I am a Walter Johnson Cluster Coordinator, along with Barbara Ferry, and DeeDee Jacobsohn. We thank you for this opportunity to comment on the proposed MCPS Operating Budget.

As you know, the Walter Johnson cluster is part of a quad-cluster comprised of Wheaton, Bethesda-Chevy Chase, Whitman, and Walter Johnson. As in past years, each cluster will focus, to some extent, on different areas of the budget. We want you to know that we fully support the MCCPTA operating budget priorities and the testimony of the other members of our quad-cluster who will be testifying next week.

Clearly, this is not a year for additional increases for educational initiatives, but we do need your help to protect and maintain the advances our students have made through the "**Major Strategic Initiatives**" that have helped MCPS achieve its recent success. Understanding this, we are in full support of the Superintendent's "**Maintenance of Effort**" budget, as we cannot fail to uphold our high level of educational standards.

Our greatest concerns for this upcoming year are:

- Class Size
- Classroom Environment
- Fully Supported Curriculum Implementation

1. Class Size

Class size is inversely proportional to academic achievement. MCPS' recent trend, in general, is to reduce class size. However, we already are above the recommended Student to Teacher ratios that research has concluded is beneficial to learning. In a period of tight budgets, it is important to protect our recent academic achievements and maintain, not degrade our teaching resources. It is especially important to target staff resources in subject areas and classrooms of highest need. This would include strategies such as:

- **Hour-based staffing** for special education students
- **Caps on class size for vital courses** such as Algebra I

2. Classroom Environment

A good classroom environment is essential to learning. The components of a good classroom include:

- **Cleanliness.** We need well-maintained classrooms free of mold and other contaminants. For example: adopt objective standards for portable conditions and installations, routine building systems maintenance, and prompt response to unanticipated repairs and maintenance needs.

- **Internal Safety/Security.** More attention is needed to address discipline problems. This includes gang related activities, bullying, and risk to student safety.
- **External Safety/Security.** We need to be able to limit the access to our schools from people who should not be there, especially portables and playgrounds. Reassessment and adjustment of traffic patterns around schools to promote pedestrian safety.

We appreciate the Systematic Team Cleaning (STC) objective that has improved the efficiency of building cleanliness, building security, and energy conservation.

Finally, Building Maintenance Plans (BMPs) for all new schools and increased implementation of BMPs for all other aging MCPS schools need to take place.

3. Fully Supported Curriculum Implementation

Parents continue to have concerns with the way that major curriculums are implemented; especially the emphasis of accelerated math curriculums.

- The parents and students require more information on the implications of taking high school level courses in middle school.
- Reform of the middle school curriculum to increase rigor, especially Writing Skills, to ensure instruction appropriate for each student.
- Better communication is required for instructions regarding Final Exams & Restrictions on number of allowed test retakes.

- The high stakes nature of High School Assessments (HSA) emphasizes the need to make sure that every student masters the curriculum.

Upon reading this year's Operating Budget, it is clear that we have common goals. The MCPS call to action **IS** the "**Pursuit of Excellence**"! Recent budget cuts have included a **hiring freeze, expenditure restrictions, and the elimination of central office positions**, yet our financial needs continue to grow. It appears that the MCPS has been able to overcome these challenges through strategic re-alignments, process improvements, and continuous hard work, but we cannot afford to back down now! We need assurance that the 142,000 students of the Montgomery County Public School System receive a **world-class education**. Please commit to maintaining the services and programs that have brought us to this point and support the staff that has made it happen.

On a final note, we **look forward to your upcoming visit to Walter Johnson High School in February** so that you may get a first hand look at what our cluster schools are doing.

Thank you and good night!