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**Walt Whitman High School  
Thomas W. Pyle Middle School**

**Bannockburn Elementary School  
Bethesda Elementary School (shared)  
Bradley Hills Elementary School  
Burning Tree Elementary School  
Carderock Springs Elementary School  
Wood Acres Elementary School**

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## **FY 2010 Operating Budget Testimony**

### **Whitman Cluster**

**January 20, 2010**

Good evening, President O'Neill, Vice President Barclay, Distinguished Members of the Board of Education and Dr. Weast. My name is Keith Parsky and with me tonight are my Whitman Cluster Co-Coordinator, Deborah Goldman and Jean Schlesinger.

It will come as no surprise to you that parents in the Whitman Cluster care very deeply about education. We want all our children to learn that reading can expand their horizons, taking them to unknown lands. We want them solving mathematical challenges and espousing interesting ideas and thoughtful discourse. And, of course, if at all possible, we want our children to be prepared for and to attend college. But most importantly, we want our children's diverse educational needs met by Montgomery County Public Schools.

We believe that the best way to meet the educational goals for all children in our County is by maintaining the reduced class size initiative. As such, the Whitman Cluster reiterates and reinforces our testimony from last year: our overriding priority

is maintaining the reduced class size initiative with **discrete grade-level classes taught by full-time classroom teachers**. We, therefore, support the Superintendent's proposed Operating Budget, because it reflects that priority. If further cuts need to be made, we urge that you maintain the reduced class size initiative, which we all worked so hard to achieve.

Sometimes parents in our Cluster have been unfairly stereotyped, mischaracterized, and even faulted for their deep and vocal concern about their children's education. Those same parents, however, have made huge commitments to help fill needs the schools' budgets have not been able to satisfy. These parents demonstrate their care and commitment in productive ways every day by volunteering thousands of hours in classrooms, at recess and in evening community events to support our schools.

Indeed, the Board of Education has asked that we, just, as we did last year, extend ourselves by working with our County Council and State delegations to secure funding for this Operating Budget and CIP. In response to your request, the Whitman Cluster again put together a strong lobbying effort. We asked parents to send letters to the Governor requesting that he support whatever legislation or other action is needed to ensure that MCPS students are not penalized - in any amount - for Montgomery County's non-compliance with the Maintenance of Effort requirements. The letters also asked for an increase in construction funds.<sup>1</sup> In the one week before

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<sup>1</sup> See Attachments A & B.

Winter Break, the Whitman Cluster sent close to 500 letters to the Governor.<sup>2</sup> And we are hopeful, based on the Governor's Budget in Brief, that funding for school construction, K-12 education and teacher pensions will be protected and even increased.

Our efforts did not stop there. On January 7, the Whitman Cluster hosted a 'Meet and Greet' to discuss education and funding issues with Majority Leader Kumar Barve, our State Senator Brian Frosh, and our State Delegates Bill Bronrott and Susan Lee. With an impressive turn-out, we had an incredibly productive and interesting evening with them. It was obvious to us that our legislators are working diligently to prevent Montgomery County Public Schools from being slapped with any M.O.E. penalty this year, and indeed, if passed, the M.O.E. bill, which they recently filed, will eliminate any penalty. Our delegation and the Majority Leader certainly demonstrated that they understand our concerns and clearly heard our strong support for MCPS.

Our efforts to help secure funding for this Budget did not stop there. Our Cluster is also scheduled to meet with County Council Member Roger Berliner on February 1 to discuss education issues and this year's Budget. As we did with our State Delegation, we hope to express our concerns and seek meaningful support.

It appears that the Governor did his part. It also appears that our State Delegation is doing their part. And we will continue to do our part by working with MCCPTA and our legislators to help ensure that maintaining the reduced class size

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<sup>2</sup> See Attachments A & B.

initiative is possible. We hope that you, too, to the best of your ability, will do your part and insist upon maintaining the reduced class size initiative and ensuring that each discrete, grade level class is taught by a full-time teacher. Indeed, we hope that you will lead the way in ensuring that those guidelines are truly met and not undermined at the last minute with cobbled together, combination classes. All clusters – including the Whitman Cluster – have been and will continue to be impacted by the economic downturn: there is overcrowding in our schools, staffing freezes, painful cuts to reading and staff development specialists at our smallest schools, lack of badly needed vice-principals, and many other significant staffing challenges. Your constructive leadership is vital, and we look forward to continuing to work with you.

Thank you and good evening.

The Honorable Martin J. O'Malley  
Governor, State of Maryland  
State House  
100 State Circle  
Annapolis, MD 21401 - 1925

December 9, 2009

Dear Governor O'Malley:

Last year, despite difficult financial times, you demonstrated your commitment to education and Montgomery County. As the parent of a child attending \_\_\_\_\_ Elementary School in the Montgomery County Public School ("MCPS") Whitman Cluster, I thank you and ask you to consider two important challenges we now face.

First, we find ourselves in an unenviable position with respect to Montgomery County's non-compliance with the FY 2010 Maintenance of Effort ("MOE") requirements. We look to you for your continued leadership in education, and ask you to ensure that students are held harmless against the consequences of any unusual or unforeseen fiscal circumstances. In this particularly difficult budget year, reduction of state funding on the magnitude now contemplated would plainly serve to penalize the very students MOE is intended to serve. We urge you to support whatever legislation or other action is needed to ensure that MCPS **students** are not penalized – in any amount – for Montgomery County's non-compliance with the MOE requirements.

With respect to capital funding, we urge that you significantly increase MCPS' allocation of State construction funds for FY 2011. We believe such an increase would be a "win-win-win" outcome for the State, as well as for MCPS students. Aging MCPS school buildings are both figuratively and literally bursting at the seams. With population growth continuing to expand at unprecedented levels in Montgomery County, the overcrowding at our schools – both in our cluster and throughout the County -- must be alleviated. Funding the capital budget is particularly critical to our Cluster, where elementary school enrollments, on average, exceed 125%. With construction costs and costs of borrowing at all time lows, this is an unprecedented opportunity to invest in school construction. Each dollar invested now will yield extraordinary returns. Such construction also provides real opportunity to put people to work now in our communities, while simultaneously providing the infrastructure needed to educate our children.

Fortifying our children's education is the most promising way to build our economic future. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of these important issues.

Sincerely,

Printed Name:  
Address:

The Honorable Martin J. O'Malley  
Governor, State of Maryland  
State House  
100 State Circle  
Annapolis, MD 21401 - 1925

December 22, 2009

Dear Governor O'Malley:

On behalf of the Walt Whitman Cluster's parents and students in the Montgomery County Public Schools ("MCPS"), we write expressing gratitude and thanks. Last year, despite difficult financial times, you demonstrated your commitment to education and Montgomery County. From Wheaton to Bethesda, we sincerely thank you for authorizing sufficient education funding in Maryland's budget last year.

As active and concerned Montgomery County residents, we are deeply concerned by the recent opinion finding that Montgomery County did not comply with the FY 2010 Maintenance of Effort ("MOE") requirements. We look to you for your continued leadership in education, and ask that you ensure that students are held harmless against the consequences of any unusual or unforeseen fiscal circumstances. In this particularly difficult budget year, reduction of state funding on the magnitude now contemplated would plainly serve to penalize the very students MOE is intended to serve. We urge you to support whatever legislation or other action is needed to ensure that MCPS **students** are not penalized – in any amount – in this process.

We respect to capital funding, we urge that you significantly increase MCPS' allocation of State construction funds for FY 2011. We believe such an increase would be a "win-win-win" outcome for the State, as well as for MCPS students. Aging MCPS school buildings are both figuratively and literally bursting at the seams. With population growth continuing to expand at unprecedented levels in Montgomery County, the overcrowding at our schools – both in our cluster and throughout the County -- must be alleviated. Funding the capital budget is particularly critical to our Cluster, where elementary school enrollments, on average, exceed 125%. With construction costs and costs of borrowing at all time lows, this is an unprecedented opportunity to invest in school construction. Each dollar invested now will yield extraordinary returns. Such construction also provides real opportunity to put people to work now in our communities, while simultaneously providing the infrastructure needed to educate our children.

The huge influx of *over 4,000* new students in the past *two years* amplifies the negative impacts of cuts to the budget and makes it extremely difficult to maintain educational excellence for all our students. Montgomery County's growing diversity also requires more resources directed to its schools. As you know, Montgomery County has more than 37,000 students who receive free or reduced meals ("FARM") -- *a number greater than the total enrollment at sixteen other school systems in Maryland*. We also have more than 16,000 students whose first language is not English - *- a number greater than the entire enrollment at ten other Maryland school systems*. Fortifying our children's education is the most promising way to build our economic future. We therefore respectfully request that you continue to fulfill your promise to protect and strengthen our children's education by funding the Bridge to Excellence and the GCEI.

Finally, we hope you will honor the significant improvements made to the teacher pension system. The 2006 improvements provide vital support to employees and enhance the ability to attract and retain highly qualified staff to serve public school students in our County and across the State. Any transfer of funding responsibility from the State to the counties, would necessarily undermine those improvements and, in effect, reverse the Bridge to Excellence commitment to increasing the State share of education funding.

To date, over 400 parents from the Whitman Cluster have sent letters to you, asking for your support on these vital issues. As the Cluster Coordinators for this cluster, we would welcome an opportunity to discuss these funding related concerns with you or a member of your office. We have provided below our respective telephone numbers and email addresses. Thank you for your time and attention to our concerns, and we look forward to the possibility of a dialogue on these important issues.

Sincerely,

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Cluster Coordinators, Whitman Cluster  
Montgomery County Council PTA