

Northwood Cluster
County Council Testimony
April 7, 2010

Good evening. I am Jennifer Chambers representing ten schools in the Northwood Cluster. In the six years since the cluster was created, the cluster as a community and the schools in it have experienced many successes; ones that allow us to hold our head high and be proud. Community building in the MCPS system is not easy with the choices that students and families are given in the Down County Consortium. However, the Northwood Cluster is tackling and meeting this challenge with some success, as exemplified by the Cluster's written testimony.

As the Northwood Cluster celebrates its many successes, for example celebrating two award winning teachers this school year, we are also faced with many **challenges**:

- Forest Knolls Elementary School's award winning Communication's Magnet teacher was notified that her **special program's** position is being cut from 1.0 FTE to .6 FTE. Her current fulltime instruction and programming provides enriching opportunities for all students in reading and writing at Forest Knolls. Enriching instruction that motivates students to attend school and want to do their best.
- Due to continuous cuts in the last two years and more projected this year, Northwood High School's **signature academies** cannot meet the programming goals established six years ago to provide opportunities to students beyond the core curriculum; such as, elective classes in the academies, partnerships with community businesses and organizations, and hands-on projects that engage students in real life experiences. The academy coordinator teaches classes and the academy head teachers teach full loads of 6 out of 8 classes; leaving no time to plan and implement opportunities beyond the core curriculum.
- The biggest challenge all schools in the cluster face is, once again, the loss of **academic intervention** teachers. These positions were cut last year and are on the chopping block again. The schools and the students in the DCC, which includes the Northwood Cluster, cannot afford any more cuts in academic intervention teachers. These teachers are essential in each DCC school to help schools make AYP and for individual student success to continue to close the achievement gap. Last spring, parents at Highland View Elementary School made a video to enable parents from their diverse community to speak directly to the need of academic intervention teachers. Please visit Highland View's PTA website to listen to these diverse voices. (www.hvespta.com scroll to "Advocacy... Using New Media to Tell Our Story")

The Northwood Cluster will encounter many hurdles in the 2010-2011 school year. Due to these challenges, the cluster would like the County Council to reinstate some of the cuts proposed by the County Executive to adhere to Maintenance of Effort. If cuts cannot be reinstated, then the cluster asks the Council to hold the line on the \$137 million dollar cuts to MCPS. Montgomery County prides itself on its exemplary educational system and markets to businesses around the country, like Discovery Chanel and Northrop Grumman, to locate in Montgomery County due to its high quality educational system for its employees. The Northwood Cluster asks the County Council to maintain a quality educational system in the county even as administrators, teachers, and students face many challenges ahead.



Silver Spring
International PTSA
313 Wayne Avenue
Silver Spring, Md. 20910

April 6, 2010

The Silver Spring International Middle School (SSI) PTSA recognizes that MCPS and the County Council face many stiff challenges with respect to the Operating Budget in the current economic climate. SSI appreciates the significant past support from the County Council and MCPS of our school community and programs, and believes that with continued support our school can become a model of middle-school reform. While the proposed Operating Budget contains a number of initiatives to maintain the gains made through middle school reform, it also anticipates potential cuts to core staffing and to special programs that we believe are essential to maintaining excellence in our very diverse school: the IB Middle Years Programme (MYP) and French and Spanish Immersion.

We recognize the need to identify potential cuts in the event of a budget shortfall, but ask you to consider ways to mitigate the impact on the schools such as ours with the greatest academic needs. Among the potential cuts that are being especially felt at Silver Spring International and many of our neighboring schools in the Downcounty Consortium:

1. Reduce by 20% academic intervention additional teacher staffing for direct support to struggling students and for intervention programs: Silver Spring International has been extremely fortunate to receive academic intervention staffing allocations to support achievement and enable us to offer an 8-period schedule and provide optimal support to students who receive double-block instruction in math and/or reading.

On behalf of these students, we ask: which intervention should we give up in a reduced schedule? As an example, Silver Spring International has over 100 licenses for the Read 180 program which is designed to be delivered in a double block to no more than 18 students per section. However, staffing is provided to all secondary schools based on an increase of one student per class in 2010-2011: 29 per class for language arts and 33 per class for all other content areas. The allocations are made without regard to educational load.

The increase in class size combined with the reduced Academic Intervention has doubly impacted our student population. For 2010-2011, the school is being asked to plan for an overall reduction of 5 positions (after one academic intervention position has been restored vs. 4 positions in 2009-2010).

We note, too, that as part of middle school reform Silver Spring International has received additional release time for team leads at each grade level. The team leads have worked diligently with students whose grades made them ineligible. These interventions have led in the past two years to a tremendous reduction in the number of students ineligible at the end of 8th grade. It

may be no accident that the ineligibility rate for our 9th graders fell this year at both Blair and Northwood, the two base-area schools for students at SSI. We believe this type of success at Silver Spring International merits continued support from the central office and county.

2. Eliminate transportation for students who live outside of the ordinary attendance zones: --this would impact immersion students as well as other students who attend Silver Spring International: these students who choose to attend SSI from outside the base area to continue in immersion are a high-achieving core group within our school: while only about 10% of enrollment, they typically represent over 50% of the students on honor roll. The need to attract and maintain a diverse and high-achieving immersion program through middle school is no less now than when this highly regarded MCPS program began in the 1970s;

3. Reduce by 20% additional positions allocated to support special programs, including immersion, magnet, IB, signature, and other special programs. We agree with the department of Accelerated and Enriched Instruction that the MYP Coordinator position is an essential part of an IB World School and that our programs must have coordinators in order to be successful. The optional 8th-grade Passion Project which continues to be selected by over half of our students, along with MYP projects developed collaboratively and offered in each content area and grade level, are distinctive and substantive parts of our MYP offering that could not continue without our 1.0 MYP Coordinator.

4. Reductions in funding of extra-curricular activities: The Silver Spring International administration will not offer any after-school activities with fees since these would preclude participation for many of our students. Therefore the continuation of stipends is essential to our ability to offer engaging enrichment and intervention programs for students after school.

Please note the following programs funded by Montgomery County that have contributed to students' success at Silver Spring International:

- Linkages to Learning
- AHCMC: Public Arts Trust and grants for Arts Integration residencies
- Montgomery County Recreation Department: stipends for staff and outside providers to offer free after-school activities (the admin will not permit any activities to be offered at a cost to students)
- Collaboration Council - multi-year funding for Pyramid Atlantic's After-School Arts/Literacy program: funding uncertain for 2011-2012
- MCPS Safe and Drug-Free Schools - funding ends in June- ESOL summer program for SSI and Takoma Middle students including community service

We ask that you consider these broad concerns as you craft a budget that can maintain progress at highly-impacted schools such as Silver Spring International.

Please Help Us Address Special Challenges

SSIMS' dedicated staff continues to strive to meet the educational needs of a diverse student body in a community with many special challenges. According to the 2008-2009 Schools at a Glance publication, over 44% of SSIMS students participate in the FARMS program (59.9% now or have in the past received FARMS), 7.8% are in ESOL, and 13.3% are categorized as Special Education (SPED) students. These percentages are among the highest in MCPS Middle Schools. While SSIMS is very pleased that it again met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) last year, it remains a perpetual challenge to increase our student achievement while providing rigorous instruction in all areas. We therefore believe that SSIMS can ill afford any reductions in staff, despite the current dramatic budget squeeze. We believe that full support for the SSIMS' current offerings (including the health and social

services offered by Linkages to Learning, the school's programs for Learning and Academic Disabilities, and SSIMS' MYP and Spanish/French Immersion programs) is critical to elevating the level of academic achievement for all of our students and to solidifying SSIMS' reputation for quality education.

Please Adjust Staffing Formulae Based on Need

We understand that in this difficult environment you must consider the possibility of increasing class sizes. However, we ask that you consider a staffing formula that recognizes the educational load in the most highly-impacted secondary schools similar to the approach taken in targeting reduced class size in grades K to 2. Such a formula would enable staff at schools such as Silver Spring International to provide equitable instruction to students at all levels of performance. We contend that equity is NOT treating everyone the same, but recognizing and addressing the huge gaps in preparedness for higher level instruction among students entering middle school. We also maintain that adjusting the staffing formula based on need would be a major step toward addressing the disparity in preparedness and achievement and would demonstrate to parents inside and outside the school a commitment to equitable instruction for all students. We believe that staffing formulae should work to help rather than hinder the students who need the most academic support.

We applaud the direction from the Central Office to provide rigorous, advanced instruction to all students. However, without staffing supports in place, what will insure that all students are successful? For example, at SSI, as in all MCPS middle schools, staffing for math classes is based on 32 students per teacher. Our students enrolled in double-block Math 6 who are at or below grade level are in classes that range from 15 to 30 students. Between 20% and 50% of these students have IEPS. Similar to the class size reductions implemented for grades K-2 in high-needs schools, staffing for grade-level Math and Reading in highly impacted schools like SSI should, in our opinion, be based on class sizes of 20 students to foster student success.

Our challenge at SSI is, as you know, compounded by the fact that, while we cannot recruit students from outside the boundary, we compete with the application and MSMC magnet schools for the most motivated students. High-performing immersion students are equally likely to gain admission to an application magnet or return to their home school, especially if it is Takoma Middle with its high concentration of GT students, as they are to attend SSI. Each high performing local or immersion student "lost" to another school translates to an increased educational load on our staff. Yet every school in the county, whether Pyle with a 1.5% FARMs rate or SSI with 44% FARMs, receives their staffing according to the same model.

In recent years we have been fortunate to receive additional staffing allocations from our community superintendent for Academic Intervention. Yet in this budget year we are told to expect and plan for less. In fact, our students and staff who don't happen to attend or teach in a less highly impacted area or magnet program deserve more than good fortune. Their higher educational load deserves to be addressed explicitly with a staffing model that is based on needs. Our basic question is whether it is acceptable that DCC ("red zone") middle school students who don't happen to be in a magnet program or school have such a different experience from those in the "green zone" in terms of opportunities for GT/honors students and enrichment for all students. Reaffirming your commitment to students in the most highly-impacted schools through staffing allocations, among other steps, would fully support the expansion of middle school reform, so a student in any DCC school in fact has the same instructional opportunities as at Pyle, Frost, or other schools with distinctly different demographics.

Please Resist One-Size-Fits-All Reductions in Stipends and Support for After-School Activities

The SSI PTSA's challenges raising funds from our families for enrichment programs go hand-in-hand with our demographics (high proportion of low-income families) and our challenges recruiting highly able students and our demographics. Our PTSA works tirelessly to find outside funding for enrichment programs such as the annual Shakespeare Theatre residency we have been "lucky" to provide to students for the past five years, and which Pyle, as an example, funds through its parent-supported Educational Foundation. We are therefore concerned that an across-the-board reduction in stipends for after-school activities will disproportionately impact SSI and other highly-impacted schools, since our administration relies on staff and MCRD-funded courses to insure that in-school and after-school enrichment opportunities are available FREE to all of our students. In all areas supporting instruction and enrichment, our students deserve no less than students whose families can and do afford more.

Please Consider Designating SSI a "Choice" School to Help Attract High-Performing Students

As described above, SSI has a problem recruiting and retaining highly motivated students. In the past, we have suggested making SSI, with its whole-school IB program, a "choice" school to help stem the outflow of students to the magnet programs. We continue to ask MCPS to give serious consideration to this proposal.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the SSI PTSA,

Stephanie Helsing
Co-President
Silver Spring International MS

Katie Ryan
Co-President
Silver Spring International MS



Northwood High School

919 University Blvd. West, Silver Spring, MD 20901

Principal: Dr. Henry R. Johnson | Phone: 301-649-8088 | Fax: 301-649-8285

April 7, 2010

To: Members of the County Council

From: Northwood PTSA Executive Board

Subject: Operating Budget Priorities

Northwood High School, as a member of the Downcounty Consortium (DCC), requests that as the County Council makes any necessary budget reductions for the FY2011 operating budget, you work to continue to focus resources on the most academically needy schools in Montgomery County. DCC high schools continue to show the highest percentage of students who fail to meet the minimal academic standards required for eligibility to participate in extracurricular activities. In 2008-2009, only 56.5% of Northwood students met the 2.0 GPA eligibility criterion during all four quarters of the school year. This performance was similar to the other DCC high schools without magnet programs (Einstein – 59.1%, Kennedy – 55.8%, Wheaton – 56.4%).

In the past year, Northwood High School made great strides in increasing the college readiness of its students against the 7 Keys to College Readiness. Significant improvement in ACT/SAT participation and scores can be directly linked to 1.4 academic intervention positions (0.8 shared with Kennedy High School) which are directed at ACT/SAT coordination and preparation. Northwood also has increased the number of AP classes being taken by students by 31% this fall with 248 more classes being taken. This was made possible by the trust that was created by using allocated staff to teach AP support classes for first-time AP students. Many students and their parents would not have enrolled were it not for this support. As a result, while the percentage of AP classes taken went up 31%, the failure percentage for these classes in the first quarter only went up 3.2% compared to the previous year. With the proposed reduced allocation of staff these results would not be possible.

Despite the gains in AP class participation and passing rates, Northwood also has the dubious distinction of being one of only two high schools in Montgomery County that failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standards of No Child Left Behind. Although we believe that the graduation rate that led to this failure was an anomaly that will be remedied next year, this result is an indication of the challenges faced by Northwood High School in serving our economically and academically diverse population.

Our high school program was changed last year by the elimination of Academy Head positions through the loss of release periods for the teachers responsible for coordinating individual academies. This reduction of planning time has drastically reduced the connections of our four academies with the community through partnerships and internships. The resulting dilution of barely established

academy programs places the future of these programs in jeopardy. Dedicated teachers, with parental support, are working diligently to maintain the academy programs; however the reduction of the Academy Coordinator position will make some of these programs unsupportable. If the school system cannot support staffing for academies, the DCC choice model needs to be examined for the future.

Every potential cut which reduces the staffing at a school like Northwood - which is working hard to close the achievement gap - moves us in the wrong direction. Increasing class size or reduction of academic achievement teachers, special program coordinators and staff development teachers leads directly to reductions in service to our students. Our data indicates that this will result in a further widening of the achievement gap that we already see.

Highland View Elementary School PTA
9010 Providence Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20901
www.hvespta.com

Testimony Delivered to the MCPS Board of Education January 20, 2010
RE: Superintendent's Recommended Operating Budget in Brief FY 2011

Good evening. My name is Amber Khan, I am the parent of a 5th grader and serve as President of the Highland View Elementary School PTA. We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the budget discussions underway.

An Unknown Fiscal Environment

While the actual impact of the economic downturn on our projected tax revenue for Montgomery County remains unknown, reports to the County Council in December 2009 suggested a potential budget gap for FY11 of 608.3 million.

With this forecast, we were surprised that the Superintendent's Recommended Operating Budget for FY2011 seeks to hold the line despite the uncertainty of the revenue shortfall as well as the Maintenance of Effort waivers. Although the proposed budget does not include explicit funding cuts, the included menu for potential reductions if not fully funded does not read like a thoughtful analysis and rationale of where our school system could become leaner and more efficient. Nor does it suggest alignment with the goals set forth in the strategic plan.

Indeed, from our vantage point, the proposed menu of cuts reduces classroom support and resources that disproportionately impact the Down County Consortium and small schools like Highland View.

Unique Demands and Highly Diverse Learners

Highland View is a unique neighborhood school and the 11th smallest in the county. We are the smallest, K-5, non-Title I school in the Northwood Cluster. The diversity of our school is reflected in the numbers. There is no racial or ethnic majority, tremendous academic diversity within each grade, and given our small size, ensuring that all students are challenged appropriately is a significant demand.

A closer look reveals how different we are from our counterparts in the more homogenous and affluent areas of Montgomery County.

Of our 350 students, 40% live below the poverty line, qualifying for Free and Reduced Meals. Many more do not qualify but still experience what experts call food insecurity. The situation has become increasingly dire and in response our school counselor coordinates a program with community partners to ensure that families in need receive backpacks with food over the weekend.

Diversity Beyond Economics

Of the 350 students, 109 children are currently enrolled in the ESOL program. Many come from Africa as well as countries throughout Central and South America. As a result, the diversity of the

cultural experiences along with the language barriers presents unique challenges to our teachers and staff.

Beyond the 109 students enrolled in ESOL we have a significant number of students who have limited English proficiency. Adding to these demands are the 5% of students requiring Special Education services and the 22% mobility rate of our student population, constantly changing the dynamic of a classroom.

Meeting the needs of the diverse populations within our community is not easy.

All Hands on Deck

We have an “all hands on deck” attitude at Highland View. Our PTA launched a highly successful Three for Me program to engage our parent community. Last year we tallied over 4,500 volunteer hours from more than 255 parents, grandparents and family members.

However, volunteers and the hours we donate cannot replace a staff person. Absent a Title I status designation, magnet programs, or a gifted and talented center, Highland View does not have access to additional funding or staffing. Indeed, no longer having Title I status led to a reduction in Academic Intervention and other support staff to assist with community outreach.

The Academic Intervention teachers, Focus Teachers and Staff Development support the entire school – their loss is felt school-wide. The role these staff members play is critical to serving those who are struggling as well as providing enrichment to those students who need acceleration. Within grade levels, the academic diversity is large enough to warrant below and above grade level differentiated instruction. However with reductions felt last year, this year's fifth graders are no longer receive acceleration in reading as they did in years prior.

Beyond Academic Intervention, we are feeling the impact of losing one para educator hour. The decrease has shifted more responsibilities to existing personnel including non-classroom staff especially when there are absences. Everybody is being asked to do more with less.

This year our Staff Development instructor and 1.8 Academic Intervention staff work closely with classroom teachers to develop targeted approaches using data indicators that point to areas of needed instruction based on test scores. At Highland View test preparation is essential to making our AYP, given the diversity of our students and the challenges they face everyone plays a role in ensuring our students succeed.

Understandably staff resources are directed to targeting instruction to those who are struggling. However, that leaves students needing acceleration and enrichment without the same levels of support. While we are appreciative that students in kindergarten reading and Math 7 each enjoy enrichment, we no longer have the staffing to provide this type of acceleration to other grade levels offered just two years ago.

Spare Classrooms in Budget Cuts

As elected leaders you realize better than most that Montgomery County is not a monolith and the challenges confronting our schools reflect the unique realities of the neighborhoods they serve.

Highland View Elementary School is the county's 11th smallest neighborhood school and staffing cuts in the school are felt throughout. The proposed cuts in the Superintendent's budget for FY2011 would disproportionately impact our school and community.

We hold our teachers and students to the same performance expectations while providing fewer resources. As you look carefully at the budget proposals line by line, we ask that you direct your attention to reducing budget expenditures that do not impact the classroom. Cuts have to be made, we understand that reality. However, we ask that you make decisions that will not adversely impact our students who face so many challenges before walking into the classroom.

Evaluate Administrative Line Items

Funding cuts need to be made but not in the classroom. Our school administrative budget is high. The fiscal crisis facing our county and state governments requires a different type of leadership and management. As Board members we need you to ask and answer the difficult questions that make any organization with a 2.2 billion dollar budget uncomfortable.

- Is there alignment between the all the departments stated functions and the products and services they provide?
- Are administrators held to performance measurements that betray the rigor and outputs that we expect from our principals and staff who directly serve students?
- Are there any services provided by MCPS that are also provided by other entities within our county and state where consolidation and streamlining could be helpful?
- Can the administration and services of MCPS become leaner and more efficient?

We take seriously your charge to oversee our school system – we elect you to hold our Superintendent accountable for his recommendations, as well as administrative and financial decisions that impact our classrooms every day.

As you begin your work session, we urge you to reject the proposed cuts outlined in the Superintendent's Recommended Operating Budget for FY2011 which disproportionately impact the Down County Consortium and Highland View Elementary School.

Thank you for your service and attention to our concerns.

Sincerely,

Amber Khan
PTA President



April 7, 2010

Dear County Council:

As President of the Forest Knolls Elementary (FKES) PTA, I welcome the opportunity to express, on behalf of our members, our concerns about the FY11 Operating Budget. We understand that budget constraints are inevitable when looking forward to FY2011. However, we are concerned that the proposed reductions not only negatively impact FKES' programs, but that the impact of these reductions will disproportionately affect red zone schools like our own by threatening to unravel all the progress we have made in narrowing the achievement gap that exists in our county. For the kids who are directly affected by the cuts in personnel and programs there is no turning back. Among our many concerns, there are primarily four reductions that the FKES community must address.

One: By decreasing academic intervention teachers by 20 percent, we are short changing the very kids who need the most help. Former Board President Sharon Cox once said: "It's not about equity of resources, it's about equity of outcomes." How can the parents of FKES be assured that our outcomes will not be inadvertently affected by reducing necessary members of our staff that help those who need the most help?

Two: There is a proposed 20 percent reduction in magnet/special program teachers -- teachers who spearhead programs that often present a once in a lifetime opportunity for many of our children. FKES is not a magnet school, but for all intentions we have a magnet program. Our Communication Arts Program serves the entire school community of kindergarten through 5th grade and supports the English Language Arts Curriculum as students learn to communicate effectively and use language proficiently for a variety of purposes. Technology is used by our students to communicate within and beyond our school community through the weekly television news show as well as through print and electronic media productions that showcase student learning. Our students continue to receive awards from the International Student Media Festival. This school year, FKES students won 16 International Awards of Excellence for class and individual productions reflecting the work of 171 FKES students. This program is headed by a highly skilled, enthusiastic, innovative, and truly dedicated magnet/special program teacher. She also provides direct instruction to students as well as collaborative teaching with kindergarten through 5th grade classroom teachers; implements a daily William and Mary reading program for 24 highly able third grade students which provides classroom teachers the opportunity to work with smaller groups of students; and supports the science journalism curriculum in kindergarten and first grades serving as a GreenKids Lead Teacher in the MCPS and Audubon Green Kids School partnership. In addition, the Jr. Press Corps, a rigorous award winning print and electronic journalism program open to all first through fifth grade students, is directed by this one magnet/special program teacher who tiers instruction to meet the needs of students performing on, below, or above grade level as well as ESOL students who benefit by developing their communication skills. Our global education program in partnership with the humanitarian organization, Free the Children, featured on the U.S. Department of Education's America.Gov website as a model humanitarian program for children, is also organized by this one teacher. When there is talk of reducing magnet/special program teachers, FKES parents need to be

assured that we will not lose our one magnet/special programs teacher and subsequently all of these programs. What of art, music, and physical education? The loss of even one of these positions in all of MCPS affects every school because valuable instructional time has to be cut somewhere -- time that has already been curtailed to a minimum cannot afford to be further cut. Many children at FKES would not be exposed to quality art, music and physical education programs if it were not for the dedication of our art, music, and physical education teachers. By threatening these positions, we are directly threatening programs and the quality of education and experiences that our children receive.

Three: There is a proposal to increase class sizes by one. When you are in a red zone school, an increase in class size has major repercussions. Our teachers will be required to do more with less. The dedicated teachers at FKES will meet the challenge, but what of our kids? Can we ask them to do more with less? The achievement gap has been reduced in recent years because of efforts to keep class sizes smaller, allowing children to receive much valued one-on-one time with teachers and para-educators. How can we be assured that in increasing class sizes, while cutting essential support staff, we are not erasing the progress that we have made? For these kids there is not a second chance. Their future education and life achievements depend upon this foundation. How can we gamble with that? How can we put a price tag on that?

Four: There is a proposed reduction by 10 percent of elementary school regular education para-educators that provide instructional support to elementary classroom teachers. Without the dedication of our para-professionals, many children would not get the one-on-one attention that is essential for their educational achievement – even with current class sizes. The needs and achievement gaps within our classrooms are too great. Not all classrooms throughout our great county begin on equal footing -- that is why we need the dedication of our para-educators to assist our classroom teachers to help kids who lag behind the starting line to catch up.

Additionally, proposals to purchase fewer textbooks and instructional materials; reduce activity bus availability or extracurricular activity stipends; and reduce staff development teachers at elementary and secondary levels will not affect schools within this county equitably. There are some PTA's and parents in this county that will have no trouble raising the funds necessary to make up for these reductions while others will struggle and be incapable of filling the gaps that the county has left behind. The demographics and current programming of a school must be taken into appropriate account and the proposed Operating Budget fails to do that. The parents and staff at Forest Knolls Elementary School are prepared to make their voices heard and we thank you for that opportunity today.

Sincerely,

Roxanne Mirabal Beltran, PTA President 2009-2010
Forest Knolls Elementary School



Montgomery County Board of Education
850 Hungerford Dr.
Rockville, MD 20850

January 7, 2010

Dear BOE members:

The Sligo Creek Elementary School PTA writes to express our support for the FY2011 budget submitted by Montgomery County Public Schools Superintendent Weast. We urge you to support this request as submitted.

If the budget is not fully funded, the proposed budget cuts threaten to harm our schools at a time when Maryland is already falling behind in national rankings. Specifically, Dr. Weast's suggested cuts would drastically impact successful foreign language programs and other areas that represent a critical investment in the future of our state and our nation (Report of the Task Force on the Preservation of Heritage Language Skills in Maryland, submitted to Governor and Maryland General Assembly January 1, 2009).

We recognize this is a difficult budget time, but our children's education is critical to the future strength of our community and our economy.

At Sligo Creek Elementary School in Silver Spring, we are home to the Downcounty French Immersion program, an Aspergers' program and the neighborhood portion of the school, known as the Academy. Our programs have been dealing with major changes.

Impact of Boundary Lines and Academy Cuts

During the 2010-2011 school year, the population of the Academy program will change as the result of the redrawing of school boundary lines. With the upcoming loss of approximately 100 students from the Academy program, we anticipate reductions in resources that could negatively impact our school. The Academy has already seen its signature science and math programs cut in half over the past 3 years. Strong local school programs in highly impacted communities are critical and we will continue to advocate for restoration of those two positions.

Key Results

Sligo Creek's programs have been very successful. Data from the last year that our school had a full-time science teacher illustrates the success of our science program. In 2008, 12% of fifth-grade Sligo Creek students achieved advanced scores on the Science MSA, and 63% were rated as proficient, for a combined advanced plus proficient percentage (A+P) score of 75%. Sligo Creek was the highest-scoring school in the Downcounty Consortium; outscored three of the county's eight schools with centers for highly gifted students; outperformed all other schools with language immersion programs except Potomac Elementary, and is competitive with Potomac (77.2%)

despite having nearly 10 times the FARMs rate; outscored College Park Gardens, which offers the Primary Years Programme in addition to Chinese Immersion and has a substantially lower FARMs rate (26.1 vs. 15.7%), with twice the percentage scoring in the advanced range; was outperformed by only two schools with higher FARMs rates: Fox Chapel, which hosts a Center for Highly Gifted Students, and Beall, which hosts an MCPS pre-school and a HeadStart program; and demonstrated success in teaching an ethnically diverse student body, with 71.4% of Hispanic students scoring advanced or proficient (versus the Montgomery County average of 47.6%) and 58.6% of African-American students scoring advanced or proficient (versus the Montgomery County average of 50.7%).

Prior Cuts to French Immersion

The French Immersion (FI) program is a model program for preparing our children to excel in this global economy, yet it has suffered dramatic cuts in each of the three previous budgets; cuts that have left the program perilously short of resources. Each year since 2008, funding for reading support, paraeducator support, English instruction (4th and 5th grades), and translation of materials has been reduced or eliminated. The program has been doing its best to recover and Academy and Immersion teachers are working together to meet the needs of all our school's students. Each year the FI program coordinator must assume additional duties, including weekly teaching sessions with 12 small groups of students who need academic intervention to help them perform on grade level. In January, she will begin teaching English to one 4th grade class and provide English instruction to 3rd grade students in preparation for MSAs. This is on top of administering regular reading assessments, training new teachers, ordering materials, and all the other duties related to managing this program.

Impact of Suggested Cuts

If Dr. Weast's budget is not fully funded, several of the cuts he proposes would negatively affect our students. We risk losing our FI program coordinator through cuts to special program teachers, which would be devastating. Paraeducators, reading initiative staff, and academic intervention staff would be at risk. A cut in transportation for immersion students would undercut and severely narrow access to the program. Yet MCPS and other studies show that immersion students in grades 4-8 perform on state tests at higher levels across demographic groups. We have a vital school with three high-quality programs. The staff have been creative in dealing with change and reductions, but the proposed cuts threaten to damage the capacity of our school to serve our students effectively.

We ask you, our elected officials, to fully support the Superintendent's budget. This will enable Montgomery County Public Schools to fulfill its obligation to county citizens and continue providing a high-quality education to our children.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Lage
PTA President
Sligo Creek Elementary School
