

BEFORE MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
TESTIMONY ON THE FY2011 MCPS OPERATING BUDGET

April 8, 2010

Wootton High School Cluster
Wootton H.S. * Cabin John M.S. * Robert Frost M.S. * Cold Spring E.S.
Dufief E.S. * Fallsmead E.S. * Lakewood E.S. * Stone Mill E.S. * Travilah E.S.

Richard S. Edelman for the Wootton Cluster

1. Good evening. I am Richard Edelman, a Cluster Coordinator for the Wootton Cluster. We appreciate the opportunity to express our views on the operating budget for MCPS.

2. For parents in the Wootton Cluster, high quality public education is generally about the highest priority they have for County government. Our Cluster has consistently supported efforts to improve our schools, increase educational opportunity throughout the County, and set higher goals for all our students. We have also supported efforts to set higher expectations and standards, provide more training and offer concomitant higher compensation for our teachers. And to facilitate those efforts, we have supported increased funding for MCPS.

3. The Council has consistently recognized that education is highly valued by County families, and we want you to know that we have appreciated the Council's historic support for appropriate funding for our schools.

4. But we understand that this year, circumstances have necessitated cuts throughout County government and that the schools cannot be immune from those cuts. We ask though, that the cuts in the school budget be limited to those proposed by the County Executive.

5. In making that request we note that the cuts will mean average class sizes will increase again, further reduction in support personnel for students who need extra help

and substantial impediments for students who ought to be attending magnet schools and special programs. And this is after MCPS already cut support personnel last year, and froze hiring this year. Beyond that, the situation we face is not merely a matter of returning to a 2008 level of funding, the cuts will occur as the size of the student population has grown, the number of students needing additional programs and support has grown and federal and state mandates have increased. The situation in our schools is not static; the need for highly qualified personnel is increasing, not decreasing. The cuts proposed by the County Executive will have real impacts in the classroom on real children. So we urge you to at least provide MCPS with the level of funding recommended by the County Executive.

6. We have also learned that there may be a cut in hours for school health technicians. The Wootton Cluster was a leader in the effort to ensure full school day coverage for health techs. The Cluster supported this change because of incidents at our schools when the health techs were not on premises, including one case where a student who fell during recess developed convulsions and had to be taken to an emergency room by a principal who had no training or expertise to apply to the situation. We believe that having a nurse in school the entire school day is very much worth the cost for the safety and health of our children, and we hope that progress in this area will not be reversed.

7. We recognize that in the current fiscal environment, it is important that we direct our advocacy efforts to the State also. We want you to know that we supported and lobbied on behalf of the waiver of maintenance of effort penalty for the current school year because of the obvious inequity of the penalty, given the role of the State in the

problem. Three of Cluster officers traveled to Annapolis to urge our State legislators to vote in favor of the penalty waiver and to generally support State funding for our schools; and we encouraged Cluster parents write to State legislators to support school funding and gave them a form letter to do so.

8. At the MCCPTA operating budget forum in January, Council member Elrich said he did not seek a Council seat in order to vote to reduce services, but it is necessary to respond the budgetary circumstances we face. We are sure that you all feel that way, and we know that you face many difficult decisions. But we hope that you will do all you can to preserve the high quality of our schools that is a hallmark of our County, that has supported property values for all residents even in difficult times, and that has been an economic engine for our County. Thank you.