

Testimony before the Montgomery County Council
On the Fiscal Year 2012 Operating Budget
April 5, 2011
Presented by Kristin Tribble, President

As you know, MCCPTA is a membership organization of about 50,000 parents, teachers and students. A major part of our mission is to advocate for children and families with the main focus centering on the quality of our public schools. As active, involved members of the community, we are aware that there are many community needs, and we appreciate the very difficult decisions you have to make in the coming weeks. We are here to remind you that support for our schools is support not just for our children today, but for the future growth of our County's economy.

Montgomery County prides itself on the quality of its schools, and you deserve much credit for the support you have provided over the years. But the biggest test of a leader's commitment to children and their future comes at times like these, when growth in tax revenues has failed to keep up with growth in school enrollment. It is exactly at this time, with more of our families in need, that the availability of a quality education and a safe, secure, healthful school environment are most important to our County.

MCCPTA again this year engaged its full membership, through input from local PTAs, in developing a set of budget priorities to guide us in our advocacy efforts. Briefly, the priorities adopted by our Delegates Assembly for the fiscal year 2012 operating budget are: no reductions in maintenance, building service or security staff; no new curriculum without adequate staff development, materials, and technology; no further increase in staff size; full implementation of hours-based staffing for special needs students; continued support for after school activities; and no reductions in academic intervention, focus, reading, ESOL, or special program teachers. Of particular note, these priorities include two items in the County budget, rather than the MCPS budget: health room aides and School Resource Officers. Please see the attached MCCPTA Resolution on School Resource Officers.

Given that the current year's budget already represents retrenchment in many of these priority areas, further retrenchment would represent significant backsliding in the maintenance of the quality of our schools. The level of funding provided for in your adopted Spending Affordability Guidelines would force major reductions in all our priority areas. This would set back the quality of education for years to come. While there may be many local government functions that can be temporarily reduced and then restored without lasting harm, public schooling is not one of them. Each kid gets one trip through school. If he misses the full reading curriculum in first and second grade, he is playing catch-up the rest of his school career.

The state makes maintenance of local effort a condition of state aid to local school districts. We support the principle of MOE, and are concerned that the county now finds itself in the position of being likely to fail this test for the third year in a row. We fear that every dollar below MOE represents an increasing breach in good faith effort to meet this principle, thus jeopardizing state as well as local support for the schools. We stand with you in efforts to maximize state assistance, as well as to find economies in the operation of the school system. But we would vigorously oppose any budget that did not provide at least the same dollar amount as last year for the schools - as provided for in the County Executive's Budget. Anything less would not just let our kids down but be a major blow to Montgomery County's reputation as a place to live and work.

To borrow from someone who actually has a paid speechwriter: "And so the question is whether all of us – as citizens, and as parents – are willing to do what's necessary to give every child a chance to success. That requires we make investments in great teachers and good equipment and labs and the Internet. It means we've got to make sure that we're emphasizing every day how important education is and we're putting our money behind it" (President Obama, State of the Union Address, January 25, 2011)

Our cluster coordinators will provide more specific descriptions of the importance of schools in the lives of our community. Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

**MCCPTA Resolution on FY2012 Operating Budget Priorities
Adopted October 26, 2010**

Whereas, MCCPTA's mission is to speak for children and without question our highest budget priority is education;

Be it resolved that the MCCPTA Delegates approve the following operating budget priorities for the organization to concentrate on this budget year, each item to be given due consideration in relation to the others:

No reductions in maintenance, building service, or security staff to maintain safe, secure, and healthful schools.

Judicious curriculum rollout; no new curriculum without adequate staff development, materials, and technology.

No further increase in class sizes,

Full implementation of hours-based staffing for special education students,

Continued support for after school activities, and

No reductions in academic intervention, focus, reading, ESOL, or special program teachers.

**MCCPTA Resolution on School Resource Officers
Adopted November 23, 2010**

WHEREAS School Resource Officers (SROs) provide vital safety and security functions at MCPS schools in partnership with school administration and staff members. These functions include crime prevention, intervention, outreach and enforcement efforts regarding alcohol and/or drugs, gangs, thefts, assaults, and other offenses; and

WHEREAS in order for SROs to achieve these functions by working consistently and proactively (in alignment with recommendations by the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education for preventing catastrophic school violence situations) we must have at least one officer assigned to every high school, with the expectation that this program will be expanded to provide support to middle and elementary schools as needed.

NOW BE IT THEREFORE:

RESOLVED that MCCPTA supports and will advocate for at least one SRO to be assigned to every high school and provide support to middle and elementary schools as needed; and

RESOLVED that MCCPTA expects improved coordination and support between Montgomery County Police Department and MCPS as well as SROs and MCPS Administration and Security at local schools, in order to provide the safe, secure learning environment to which Montgomery County school children and staff are entitled.

Back Ground on the MCCPTA Operating Budget Priorities:

MCCPTA officers visited PTA leadership in each area of the county in June and July, 2010. The list of priorities represents the most frequently mentioned concerns. Below are further details on each item.

No reductions in maintenance, building service, or security staff to maintain safe, secure, and healthful schools.

Devoting resources to the classroom includes devoting resources to ensuring a classroom environment that facilitates learning. Components of a good learning environment include:

- well-maintained classrooms free of mold, vectors, and other contaminants
- freedom from bullying and gang activities
- reasonably limited access to school facilities
- School Resource Officers in every high school.

Judicious curriculum rollout; no new curriculum without adequate staff development, materials, and technology.

Parents around the County continue to have concerns about the way major curriculum reforms are implemented, including the integrated elementary school curriculum, middle school advanced courses leading to high school credit, and the accelerated math curriculum. Adequate supports would include:

- more assistance to students in filling in gaps in their background
- more teacher training BEFORE introducing the changes
- adequate instructional materials.

No further increase in class sizes

Until FY 2011, MCPS had made progress toward reducing class sizes. In a period of tight budgets it is important to protect that progress against further budget cuts.

Full implementation of hours-based staffing for special education students

As budget pressures force class sizes up, hours-based staffing for students with learning differences is especially important to minimize adverse impacts on both these students and general education students.

Continued support for after school activities

After school programs are important both to provide additional learning and enrichment opportunities, and to extend the protections of the school community environment to students beyond the school day. The latter is an important component of gang prevention.

No reductions in academic intervention teachers, focus teachers, reading teachers, or special program teachers

Especially in light of other budget cuts in recent years, it is crucial to have these additional teaching resources to fill in the gaps for students needing re-enforcement of existing classes, or above- or below- grade level learning opportunities. .