

Before the Montgomery County Board Of Education

FY 2008 Operating Budget Testimony
Poolesville Cluster

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for the cluster

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Good evening . My name is Sarah Defnet and tonight I am here to share the Poolesville Cluster's thoughts on the FY 2009 Operating Budget.

We are the smallest cluster within MCPS, consisting of four schools. Our cluster is the direct beneficiary of the MCPS initiative which placed the upcounty Whole School Magnet Program at Poolesville High School. We are grateful for the continued support by MCPS and the Board of Education, as the FY 2009 budget continues support for the expansion of the program to grade 11 and the extended day model to meet the requirements of the Humanities and Math and Computer Science themes. Ensuring sufficient funding for all aspects of the program remains a high priority for our cluster to assure the magnet program meets the original goals of (a) providing an educational program for the certificate students commensurate with the other successful magnet programs in the county, and (b) providing an interdisciplinary experience for all students in the program.

In addition to the increases, the FY 2009 budget calls for a reduction in special allocations (from 12 to 6) for high school special programs. These are system-wide positions that currently exist to provide extra planning release periods for teachers to create program content and to allow for small

school scheduling. How these reductions will be allocated among the magnet high school programs is a decision that will be made later by the Department of Accelerated and Enriched Instruction.

While we don't yet know the specific impact on Poolesville High School, it is safe to say that the parent community is concerned that it may be premature to assume that we no longer need additional staffing to allow for small school scheduling. Total school enrollment is only one factor in the small school scheduling equation. In order to provide a rigorous, challenging selection of courses, some of the advanced courses may still be under enrolled to class size standards – yet necessary to make programs complete. For example this year we were able to offer a multi-variable Calculus course with only ten enrolled students, and offer low enrollment higher level French classes to maintain two foreign language choices for our students. The additional allocations we have received in the past have helped us work around the limitations created by our small size.

Most school populations are large enough that they are able to offer a class multiple times over the course of a day. In our middle school and high school, it is not unusual for a course to only be available during a single period. This type of limitation effectively denies student access to a course when a conflict arises with another required course. Parents in our cluster have shared examples of situations where their children, who are students in the Whole School Magnet (Interdisciplinary) Program, have experienced difficulty gaining access to some challenging courses, leaving them with non-rigorous alternatives. Thus, while we are making progress, there is still

evidence that our small school woes may not be over and thus we have some concern about how the allocation cuts might affect us.

We fully support the middle school reform initiatives. John Poole is developing programs that parallel the Phase I school programs and looks forward to the additional support the reform brings. This summer we received new computer technology as part of the “tech mod” process and we applaud the forward thinking of including Promethean Boards, included in middle school reform technology, to the tech mod schools. As a result we now have 18 classrooms equipped with Promethean board technology that is making it possible for our wonderful teachers to engage students in new ways. Despite the number of changes our middle school teachers have incorporated this year, they willingly embraced this new technology and immediately began incorporating it into their instructional practices.

The operational budget also touches on a few health and safety issues that are important to our cluster. We appreciate the efforts being made by MCPS to improve the indoor air quality at Poolesville High School and the special efforts made to clean the coils on the HVAC units that were not replaced this summer. We are glad to see the Division of Facilities Management goals include “ensuring a safe and healthy learning environment in all facilities” (7-41). While the FY 2009 operating budget makes a case for a “growing demand in response to customer requests related to indoor air quality” (7-65), it does not request additional positions. Perhaps it is accounted for in some other way that is not apparent to us. Let’s make sure we adequately fund maintenance to the proper level needed to maintain a healthy indoor air environment.

In the coming months difficult decisions will have to be made. The
Pooleville Cluster supports your collaboration with the employee unions.
Attracting and sustaining quality teachers will continue to make MCPS one
of the outstanding school systems in the nation.