

Greetings esteemed Members of the Board of Education. I am here tonight to offer testimony regarding the proposed Operation Budget and its effects upon the **Clarksburg Cluster**.

For those new to the Board, the Clarksburg Cluster celebrating its seventh month of existence with students but has been anticipated for years. Our cluster very much reflects the rest of our county in its cultural, ethnic diversity, socio and economic and religious diversity. We're experiencing the reality of the boundary decision that has this cluster incorporating four different educational groups (former Damascus, Seneca Valley, Watkins Mill and new Clarksburg residents) into the county's newest high school cluster. I want to say the transition has been smooth, but that would be a bit of an exaggeration. Our community is experiencing the ups and downs of learning from each other but we're pulling together to make Clarksburg one of the county's best clusters!

Speaking of our transition; I think this proposed budget is trying to address some of the transitions needed to keep our school system "top notch". As we spoke to parents, teachers, and support staff, they seem hesitant to fully embrace the new Special Need Realignment. This angst comes from seeing programs cut that had proven results for these students. This fear is exacerbated by the swiftness of the changes. Students are being forced back into their home schools through the Special Needs realignment when the school system has recognized the student's needs cannot be fully handled by the home school. Now, it's being recommended these students return to the same home school environment and our parents are concerned all the tools, training, and facility needs will not be in place in time. Much of this hesitation is due to the awkward implementation standards in practice for the current elementary school curriculum roll-out and the difficulties with implementing the new Grading and Reporting policy. The most recent evidence that items are feeling expedited is the overwhelming plea to slow the new middle school reform so the community can be adequately educated about this desired process. I think it wise to slow down the speed in which some of these decisions are made especially as they pertain to the dollars and cents of this budget.

As stated earlier, the Clarksburg community is diverse and we embrace the international flavorings offered by our new families to our schools and to Montgomery County. This embrace is also a call upon MCPS to add more ESOL teachers, bilingual counselors, and Parent Outreach Specialists to the county in general. This is a huge concern in the Clarksburg Cluster. Our newest elementary school, Little Bennett, which opened in 2006, has an enrollment 550 and a student population that speaks 36 different languages. This is reflective of all the schools in our cluster and as we look at this growth we ask that our schools be reinforced to meet the changing diversity needs. The Round 7.0 Household Population Forecast for the Clarksburg Planning Area shows a population of 5,550 in 2005 and a population of 42,400 in 2030. Please do not ignore Clarksburg's ESOL and outreach needs. We want to stay proactive and have the resources required to get an entire family involved and integrated in the MCPS learning process. Another need will be teachers and support staff to keep our schools functioning. Clarksburg High School will be gaining another grade level and 3 of our 5 elementary schools are projected to have increased enrollment anywhere between 50 to 200 NEW students.

As we addressed some of our specific needs, we want it very clear that the operating budget needs to cover the financial resources to obtain and retain the quality of teachers mandatory to execute the curriculum and policies in place. After speaking to teachers, they believe the unions have negotiated compensation packages that will attract the teachers, the staff, the drivers, and the support service workers required to maintain the quality educational system which has attracted so many families to MCPS. Funding the salary needs helps our teachers incorporate themselves into our communities which inevitably keeps quality teachers within Montgomery County and eliminates commuting costs and the need to house share. A teacher should be able to rent and/or own a home within the county they teach.

We want to also commend you for your forward thinking about upcoming CIP projects. It is pleasing to see the county save our tax-payer dollars by recycling architectural plans that work. Clarksburg Elementary School #8 is using the same plans used to build Great Seneca ES and Little Bennett ES. Brilliant!

Our maintenance needs are being fulfilled at a slow pace and many times things that require maintenance, when requested, now require replacement. This could be due in part to the small number of qualified maintenance workers and the large county in which they must service. Please, if possible, add qualified workers to help get work orders completed in a timely manor.

Sadly, Clarksburg has learned that a well-run, proven-effective program for alternative students is being eliminated. Kingsley Wilderness Program needs to remain open for ALL high school students in our county who are not identified Special Ed, but need an Alternate Program in order to succeed. This program truly ensures success for EVERY student! Kingsley is the only work/study alternative program in MCPS. Students form a work force program that creates paths and helps maintain Little Bennett Park, Black Hills and Clarksburg community gardens. Kingsley has serviced over 200 children in its existence. Please remember, Kingsley is a place of healing.

The Clarksburg Cluster would like to acknowledge we support the MCCPTA testimony, the operating budget compact along with the resolution on operating budget priorities.

With some trepidation, we request you fund Dr. Weast's proposal. Dr. Weast has done a great job vision casting our future, but the implementation falls upon you. Ultimately you, our elected officials, are the one's we hold responsible for the education of our children. While the COP proposal encompasses some well-thought out programs, I hope adequate training will be allowed, with compensation, for teachers to learn how the new and improved program changes are to be fulfilled. I hope the salary increases help MCPS to obtain and retain our teachers and staff members. I hope you will **reconsider** the closure of the Kingsley program and last I hope you will see that our community is diverse and requires greater support from the school system to supply a quality education to our diversified community.

Thank you for your time this evening.