

# Seneca Valley Cluster

Seneca Valley High School  
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School  
Roberto Clemente Middle School

Lake Seneca Elementary School  
S. Christa McAuliffe Elementary School  
Dr. Sally K. Ride Elementary School  
Waters Landing Elementary School

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## Comments on The Superintendent's Recommended FY 2008 Operating Budget

Prepared by: Juan Johnson, Cluster Coordinator  
January 11, 2007

Members of the Board of Education, good evening, I'm Juan Johnson, Cluster Coordinator for the Seneca Valley Cluster schools. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on the Superintendent's Recommended FY2008 Operating Budget. During my testimony I will discuss some county-wide issues and many issues related to the Seneca Valley cluster.

The Seneca Valley Cluster supports MCCPTA's Operating Budget Compact and the priorities:

- Increase Secondary Literacy
- Close the achievement gap
- Expand after school programs
- Expand the Special Education Hours based staffing model
- Increase the number of Parent Community Outreach Coordinators
- Provide for safe, secure, clean, healthy, and modern school facilities, and
- Improve the curriculum roll out process

Last year we supported and we continue to support having an assistant principal at every elementary school. The demands placed on principals in general, but specifically in this case, elementary school principals, is just too great to have them go-it-alone. The assistant principal is a valuable leader in the school and provides continuity and direction when the principal is called out of the building.

We also support the increase in elementary art, music, and physical education staffing. These are vital programs for students, which help to develop the whole child and lead to better performance in all subject areas.

The inclusion of more funding for middle and high school counselors is encouraging. Reducing the number of students per counselor will help to give the counselors and students time to interact and address issues rather than react to situations.

### Lake Seneca Elementary School

Lake Seneca ES is seeking funds to provide a Summer School Program for K-5 which will focus on intervention and acceleration. Funds will be used to provide program content, staffing and transportation.

Lake Seneca ES is also requesting funds to start the Jr. Great Books Program as a Before and/or After School Program. Funds will be used to cover the cost of materials and training. Many elementary schools have had success with this program in increasing student's literacy skills and enjoyment of reading. Due to the growing number of students in Math A, Lake Seneca ES is requesting funds for a certified Math A.

#### **Waters Landing Elementary School**

Waters Landing ES is looking for additional funds to support their inclusion/mainstreaming special education program.

The Seneca Valley cluster schools have all embraced Baldrige. Parents appreciate the openness and information from Baldrige guided instruction and school improvement. Waters Landing ES is the proud site of one of the counties Baldrige Quality Academies.

#### **PLCI**

Sally Ride and McAuliffe ES are participating in the PLCI program. Staff have reported positive results from the study groups. We are in support of the continued funding of the PLCI program so that all elementary schools can benefit from this training.

#### **Roberto Clemente Middle School**

We are pleased to support the continued funding of the Magnet programs at Roberto Clemente MS. These programs are a valuable resource for students in the upcounty area. Clemente MS is requesting an addition of one media assistant in technology position to support the Humanities Program – this is to provide the same level of resources as is provided by the Humanities Program at Eastern MS. With the success of the magnet programs, this has caused an increase in the student body at Clemente MS. This necessitates the addition of more security personnel to provide appropriate coverage -- currently there are only two security staff for a school of over 1,100 students.

#### **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School Student Performance and Academic Rigor**

Read 180 has been implemented at MLK MS this school year. There are currently 60 students in the program, seventh and eighth grade students who scored 23 point above or below proficiency on the MAP-R assessment. This program is part of the regular school day for the students and there schedules are adjusted accordingly. Students in the Read 180 program have demonstrated growth in reading fluency and comprehension. MLKMS is looking for additional funding to increase the number of available slots to 120 for the 2007-2008 school year. MLK MS is conducting a 90 day pilot of the Soliloquy Reading Assistant program. This computer based program allows struggling readers to make progress at their level and pace. Soliloquy allows students to practice oral reading independently and provides audio and visual help for words the student is struggling with. The program provides the student (and teacher) with a review list of all words the student received assistance with. There are 100 students participating in the program. This program is conducted before and after school, and during the advisory period (PAWS). MLK MS hopes to continue this program throughout the school year and receive funding for full implementation for the 2007-2008 school year.

MLK MS is interested in the Cambridge Checkpoint program. This program is the lead in to the Cambridge AICE program (currently available at Seneca Valley HS) and is similar to the IB Middle Years program. This program offers increased rigor to challenge highly able students and provides the necessary preparation for AP and Cambridge courses. To go with this, a summer Pre-AP academy, which MLK MS had in previous years, would benefit those students who have the ability to pursue AP courses, but need additional instruction to prepare for the challenge of the AP curriculum.

### **Learning Centers**

Currently MLK MS is the site of a Learning Center that serves 35 students, 10 from the MLK MS community and 25 from the surrounding area. Students have been placed in the Learning Centers based on their IEP. School staff and the parents have determined that the Learning Center provides the best opportunity and environment for the student to be successful. We are not as concerned about where Learning Centers are located, though we are happy to host one, but we want to make sure this is an option for those students that need this level of service. There is great concern that phasing out the Learning Centers will restrict the range of services that can be offered to those students who need self contained classes. Will every school be able to offer self contained classes for their students, even if it is only one or two students that need that level of service?

Parents in the MLK MS community who are knowledgeable about special education services have been supportive of moving to an hours based staffing model. However, this was never intended to take the place of the Learning Centers. We see the Learning Centers as part of the continuum of service and a viable choice for some students. We are also concerned that the level of service at the student's home school will not be able to accommodate the needs of the students. Will there be enough staffing, training and expertise in the areas needed to provide service to the students and their varying needs?

MLK MS PTSA voted to recommend a delay in implementing the phase out of the Learning Centers to give time to have more public discourse on the subject so parents and staff can understand the full rationale and implementation strategy, as well as having time to receive feedback from the middle schools that are currently piloting the hours based staffing model.

MLKMS PTSA also voted to oppose the plan to reduce ESY from five days to four days per week. This will cause great hardship to try to find day care and services for one day per week. ESY serves the students who can least afford to have a disruption in services. Lack of services could jeopardize the progress these students have made during the school year.

### **Seneca Valley High School**

The Seneca Valley cluster is seeking full recognition and funding for the Cambridge program. We would like to see the same level of commitment and resources, which include a full time coordinator, as is afforded to the IB programs in the county. At Seneca Valley High School we currently have 134 students enrolled in the Cambridge Program. Last May we had 65 students sit for 113 examinations.

The Academies Program has completely changed the academic climate at SVHS. There were 124 Academy graduates last spring and 118 students participating in internships. Funding is needed for two positions, an Academy Coordinator (RT) and one FTE teaching position that will accommodate .2 for each of the five Academy Lead Teachers.

The mission of the Academy of Arts and Media Studies at Seneca Valley High School is to provide students with the opportunity to develop knowledge-based skills in the areas of traditional and digital art forms as well as in various forms of communication and media.

The Academy of Business and Finance will provide students opportunities to develop leadership qualities, management strategies, critical thinking skills, teamwork, and effective communication skills in order to be successful in college and business careers.

The Academy of Human Service provides students who have the desire to serve their community with the skills they will need to meet the needs of others and themselves. Students prepare to work in a variety of settings that involve the ability to relate to others.

The Academy of Science provides students with the knowledge and skills needed to not only compete, but excel and thrive in the scientific community. The Academy of Science also provides students with unique opportunities to interact with professionals in the areas of medicine, biotechnology and engineering.

The Academy of Technology prepares students to work in areas involving analyzing, studying, and applying scientific principles, theories, and/or methods as they relate to computers, automotive trades and electronics.

SVHS applied for and received a grant that was used to institute the academies and the Cambridge program. The term of the grant has concluded and we are asking MCPS to continue the funding of these programs.

### **Middle School Reform**

A few comments on the Middle School Reform -- although there has not been enough time for many parents to read and react to the entire report, both Clemente and MLK MS parents are hoping the pilot program can be expanded to more than 5 schools with the training and resources spread over a variety of schools. Parents feel a few well designed and efficiently implemented initiatives can affect change in a positive way that is measurable and can be directly accounted to the new initiatives. Parents are concerned that there will be no way to know which initiative is working.

Middle school parents would like to see a more coordinated system for middle school summer programs. In the past, programs were developed by each middle school and there was no information on the MCPS website about the programs in each middle school. We are not looking to take away the autonomy of each middle school, rather a simple central collecting point for middle school summer programs so parents have a resource to evaluate the programs that are being offered at their home school and middle schools around the county.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the recommended operating budget. I look forward to working with the Board to secure the funding to effectively educate all the students of MCPS.

#### Attachments:

- MLK MS PTSA Operating Budget Needs and Resolutions
- Letter on PLCI, SKRES PTSA President
- Letter on Learning Center, SKRES 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Teacher
- Letter on Learning Center, MLKMS PTSA
- Letter on Learning Center, MLKMS Parent

**Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School**  
**Operating Budget Needs**  
Linda Koeln, PTSA President

1. **Read 180 - additional seats**
2. **Soliloquy Reading Intervention - continued funding**
3. **Learning Center - adequate funding and resources to immediately implement the hours based staffing model so there is a continuum of service for affected students.**

1. **Read 180**

The recently implemented Read 180 program now serves 60 students at MLK. Students targeted for this program are seventh and eighth graders who scored 23 points above or below proficiency. The program is computer based and rotates students through small group intervention, computer tasks and independent reading. Students participate in this program during the school day in place of their reading class.

In the coming year, MLK could serve 120 students with additional funding of this program. Students have demonstrated immediate growth in reading as demonstrated in fluency, comprehension, and phonemic awareness assessments.

2. **Soliloquy**

The recently implemented Soliloquy Reading Intervention currently serves 100 students at MLK through a 90-day pilot program. Students selected are struggling readers over all three grades. The program is intended to increase fluency and comprehension in reading. It is an interactive computer program where students can be read to, students can read to the computer and the computer corrects pronunciation and other errors. Comprehension can also be evaluated. Students participate in this program before school, during homeroom and after school.

MLK hopes to continue the program after the 90-day pilot program and make it a standard part of our literacy program in coming years. Thus far, progress is compelling.

3. **Learning Centers**

MLK is the site of a Learning Center serving 35 students. This is the home school for 10 of these students. Our students make tremendous progress each day with the wonderful staff that supports them. They are included in regular classroom environments during part of the day as appropriate. If the Learning Centers close, the necessary funding and resources need to be in place in all home schools so that each student receives a comparable continuum of education. Level of staff and teacher/para-educator training and support will be critical. The funding and resources adequate to support the transition and continued education of these students must be available immediately. This change will only be successful if students are given emotional support during transition from the current center environment, particularly those transitioning from middle to high school.

Parents, students and administrators were taken by shock and alarm when this change was announced. As a school with a Learning Center, our Principal should not have heard about the loss of our own center through a parent. Many parents in our community are still not aware of the impact these changes will have. Unless they are following MCCPTA listserv communications, little information has been made available to the general population. Every student in the MCPS system will be affected by these changes. People don't like change in general but particularly when it is not communicated appropriately.

**The MLK MS PTSA approved the following resolutions at their Jan 9<sup>th</sup>, 2007 Executive Board Meeting:**

“The MLK MS PTSA recommends that any action regarding the phasing out of the 8 secondary school Learning Centers as included in the Operating Budget be deferred until more information is available about the pilot programs at both Silver Spring International School and Forest Oak Middle School and until there is additional time for public comment and study of this controversial issue.”

“The MLK MS PTSA opposes the reduction of service in the ESY program from 5 days per week to 4 days per week.”

**PLCI**

The PLCI is a two year program and we are in the second year. They started with case studies of Blue Ribbon schools and other successful businesses and what was working for them. Then it went into how each school could incorporate some of the best practices into the school day. The schools in the PLCI meet every couple months to hear speakers on different topics and then the schools have time to divide into groups and discuss some of the practices that have been successful. So, Sally Ride can sit with Damascus Elementary and find out what is working for them and what is not. The staff that attends these meetings spends a lot of time trying to maximize instruction time. Everyone that is attending has positive things to say and they feel they are making strides towards having a Professional Learning Community.

At Sally Ride we have had some changes come out of these meetings and I feel they are for the better. The day to day scheduling of specials and interventions is much more organized and benefits the teachers and their planning. Also they have started quarterly data chats to help those students who need the extra push to get them to reach the next level.

Karin Bonnett  
President, SKRES PTA

**Learning Centers**

I am a first grade and inclusion teacher at Sally Ride Elementary School. A Learning Center is housed at our school and I have worked closely with the teachers and students because I had students that were included in my regular ed. class all or most of the day.

I would like the Board to reconsider the closing of all Learning Centers in middle and high schools. Although I believe in inclusion I feel that there needs to be this option for students who are leaving elementary school. Although many students will do well in the regular education some students will need the extra support that a learning center class offers.

Thanks,

Sharon Thorne  
1st Grade Teacher  
Sally Ride Elementary School

January 11, 2007

Ms. Nancy Navarro, President  
Board of Education  
850 Hungerford Dr.  
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Ms. Navarro:

On January 9, 2007, the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School PTSA Executive Board put forth the following recommendation concerning Learning Centers.

“The MLK PTSA recommends that any action regarding the phasing out of the eight secondary school Learning Centers as included in the Operating Budget be deferred until more information is available from the pilot programs at both Silver Spring International School and Forest Oak Middle School and until there is additional time for public comment and study of this controversial issue.”

Our school is home to a Learning Center, and we are aware firsthand that neither the community nor staff was made aware of the phase out of these programs prior to its inclusion in the proposed Operating Budget. As a county that values parental input, we ask that it be allowed in this very important issue.

Decisions made concerning Learning Centers affect all students, not just those participating in Learning Center programs. We ask that you allow the citizens of our county time to evaluate and respond to this proposal. This seems to be a small thing to ask with so much at stake.

Sincerely,  
Linda L. Koeln  
MLK PTSA President  
301-540-4132  
LLKoeln@verizon.net

January 11, 2007

Dear Mr. Johnson:

I am writing to you today because I am very concerned about the special education changes in the proposed budget. I would like you to please include this letter in our Cluster testimony.

While I wholeheartedly support "Hours based staffing", I do not see why funding it should be used as reason to close the Secondary Learning Centers. The Learning Centers are an important component of the placement continuum required by law. The children in these placements are there because their IEP teams decided that that was where their IEP's could be met in the Least Restrictive Environment. This placement provides the only small, self contained classroom where a child can earn a diploma. If this is taken away, many of these children will be left behind. I believe that most of these children, those whose parents cannot get them a private placement, will be forced out of the academic track and into certificate programs when they cannot handle the new environment that they are being forced into. The vast majority of these home schools will not have the funding, needed training, planning time or increased staffing needed to support children with significant needs. These students are not being offered the choice that other students now seem to have so much of. How is it we can fund a multitude of specialized programs for general ed children such as language immersion, self contained gifted, arts, IB, ecology, humanities, math, technology, robotics, information technology, aerospace, etc. and yet cannot give these special ed children what their experienced IEP team says they need to be successful. Learning Centers at the secondary level must remain as a choice for those who need this intensity of service in order to access and benefit from the general curriculum. These programs provide an opportunity to teach students the skills and strategies that may be impacted by their disability. Where will these students be taught the Wilson method of reading, alternative ways for writing, organizational strategies, memory strategies, how to utilize assistive technology, self advocacy skills, social skills, etc.? Why must all the Centers be closed? This proposal seems to many of us not to be about serving children, but to be a numbers game; spread these kids out, their test scores are diluted, and more schools then make AYP.

The hours based staffing model was designed to support the LAD program and it shows promise of being very helpful in that regard, but this was the first year it was piloted and the results are not yet in. I believe we should wait to see the results of the pilot before we expand the program.

I also support the proposal to increase the number of transition support staff by six, one for each quad cluster. Our transition program is under funded and under staffed and the future success of many of our students depends on a smooth transition to their adult life after high school.

The last budget item that I am concerned with is very troubling, the cutting of funds for ESY. Changing the availability of this program from five days a week to four days a week is just wrong. ESY serves the neediest children in our county and the summer services they receive are supposed to be determined, based on need, by their IEP team. The cutting back of these days will undermine the progress they make throughout the year. I also think that many parents will be unable to allow their children to attend because they will be unable to find daycare for just one day a week. It is often hard to find care for these children anyhow, but for one day a week? It may be impossible for many to do so, and so these children too, will be left even further behind. These cuts to Special Ed programs and services do not serve the children of our county well and isn't that what the Board of Ed is really there to do?

Sincerely,

Barbara Selbst  
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Germantown, MD 20873