

Dear Members of the Board of Education,

We understand the pressures facing you and your colleagues on the County Council in this very difficult budget season. While Maryland has been named #1 in education for the third straight year, we are facing budget cuts that could undermine the investments that have made Montgomery County Public Schools such an important part of that success.

As proud parents of a Highland View E.S. student, we want to talk to you about how special this school has been to our son and our family.

Under Principal Dardarian, the staff and leadership at Highland View have done an outstanding job of making Highland View part of the community as well as its own strong community. Everyone in the neighborhood thinks of it as the “neighborhood school,” and we feel that we know or recognize almost everyone we see at school events, even with a 20% mobility rate.

Attending Highland View has allowed our son to grow up in a very diverse school. This diversity brings both rewards and challenges. If you had seen International Night last month you would have seen that his classmates include first-generation immigrants from every continent and some that have fled extreme hardship to seek a brighter future in America. Learning to cooperate with children from so many environments will be an advantage for HVES students in the global economy. As a result of this diversity, about one-third of Highland View’s students receive ESOL services, and many students have limited proficiency in English. Some have arrived speaking no English at all, but a number of students with similar language backgrounds have stepped up to help ease the adjustment process for the new students. These language requirements present special demands on the teaching staff, and the threat of further budget and staffing cuts will make it hard for the dedicated staff to continue to serve the needs of all children.

As active members of the Highland View PTA, we have been consistently impressed by the strong attendance of teachers at PTA meetings, the number of teachers that come to PTA-sponsored events outside of school hours, and the number of cars still in the faculty parking lot when we pick our son up after we get off work. It is that dedication and love that has helped our son to reach his potential, whether it is in advanced math or art or being a responsible member of his community. Thanks to a teacher who understands inquisitive boys and wants to take on that challenge, we have seen our son bloom in third grade as he makes the connections among the subjects he studies and with the larger world.

As you examine the current budget proposal and work with the superintendent to implement the final budget, as approved by the County Council, we hope that you will take into account the special needs of schools such as Highland View, where the diverse set of needs and the small size make it difficult to use a formula-based system for budgeting purposes. As a small school, the loss of even a fraction of a teacher position may mean that progress against MCPS goals will be extremely hard to meet and sustain.

Thank you for your dedication to the students of Montgomery County.

Sincerely,

Patrick Stuart and Natasha Caplen

111 Normandy Dr.
Silver Spring, MD 20901