

**FY2012 Operating Budget Testimony  
Kennedy Cluster**

John F. Kennedy High School  
Col. E. Brooke Lee Middle School  
Argyle Middle School

Bel Pre Elementary School  
Georgian Forest Elementary School  
Glenallen Elementary School  
Strathmore Elementary School

Submitted by: Frances Frost, MCCPTA Kennedy Cluster Coordinator  
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Thank you for this opportunity to represent the Kennedy Cluster in regards to the proposed FY 2012 Operating Budget. I commend the Board and Dr. Weast for their commitment to developing a budget which preserves initiatives to improve student achievement in the face of uncertain funding from the county, state, and federal levels.

This past Monday, we observed the birthday of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In addition to the annual discussion of whether Dr. King's dream of equality and security for all has come true, there was the anticipation of the King Memorial which will overlook the Tidal Basin in Washington DC.

I read with interest the details of the construction of this monument. This project has taken fourteen years to come to fruition and is estimated to cost \$120 million in its entirety. Upon completion, it will stand 30 feet 8 inches tall. The "Mountain of Despair" and the "Stone of Hope" were hewn from 1600 metric tons of granite. The block from which Dr. King's face was chiseled weighs 46 tons, alone. There was a multi-national sculpting and construction team to work on the monument, lead by a master sculptor and architect.

There are parallels between the construction of this monument and the education of our children. Each teacher is a sculptor and each child is a block of raw stone – some are clay, some are granite – each are different. In fourteen years, the teachers are expected to take this empty, raw material and construct a masterpiece.

Consider if the King sculptor would have been told "We want a monument that is taller than the two other Presidential statues, cut from over 1000 tons of solid rock. But you will have to do it without a hammer or a chisel." I can imagine that this would be a difficult task without these few basic tools.

Members of the Board, we understand that you are mandated to build over 140,000 little monuments each year, and next year you are expected to do it on a budget that may not cover all the expected

expenses. It's a tough position that leaves you only a few options. You can make less quality sculptures, use less tools to make those sculptures, or put less sculptors to work.

The first option is not feasible for our community. We cannot expect Montgomery County Public Schools to provide a less than quality education for the young people of our county. The statistic as been batted around during these budget discussions that only 25% of county residents have children in the school system, as if to justify or explain less support of public education. But I contend that 100% of residents want educated young people graduating from our schools. Whether they are parents or not, I am sure that all residents want their cashiers to be able to count, their future fireman to be able to problem-solve, their future doctors to be able to make accurate measurements, their future lawyers to be able to read, their future county executive to understand government. A quality education does not only affect the 144,064 students in the seats, but each and every person in our community. So we cannot lower the bar on a quality education. Let's be optimistic that the County Council also realizes that and will support the needed county funding.

That leaves us the other options, playing with the ratio of sculptors and tools. In a perfect economy, with seemingly unlimited barriers, we would want each sculptor to have a relatively small number of sculptures to build. Its hardly arguable that smaller class sizes benefit the students. But we realize that class size, the people and the resources in the classrooms, and the supportive staff outside of the classroom is where we have the most flexibility within our budget constraints.

A sculptor uses chisels, hammers, rasps, rifflers, grinders, and polishers, selecting the proper tools needed, determined by the type of rock that they will sculpt. Our schools have pare-educators, math content coaches, reading specialists, Focus teachers, ESOL and special education services and many other specialized tools to meet the diversity of needs that are presented by the students. These are the tools that our schools have to hew out literate, functional, and intelligent young people from the blank slates that enter pre-school and kindergarten. If some of the tools have to be taken away, and indeed, that seems inevitable, consider carefully which ones and from which sculptors.

Its been said that this year's budget decisions will be similar to those made last year, that many of the cuts will reflect those same cuts that were made last year. And again, as I did when I stood before you last year, I implore that you consider where those cuts are made and the impact that it will make. Yes, the budget outlook is dour, tax revenue is down, state and federal funding is questionable. And in the Kennedy Cluster, we also face a similar social and educational situation as we did last year.

On average, the seven schools of the Kennedy Cluster have 56.8% students receiving free & reduced-price meals, 26.1% more than the school system average of 30.7%. Georgian Forest Elementary school is a Title I school, with 73% of its students in poverty situations – more than twice the county average. We have 19.8% students enrolled in English for Speakers of Other Languages, compared to 13% across the school system. In our Cluster, 12.2% students receive special education services, slightly more than the 11.9% for the county.

The students of the Kennedy Cluster, like others in the DownCounty Consortium can barely withstand too many severe cuts to our schools. We do not have the community resources that some take for granted. If a para-educator is lost, we have few readily available parent or community volunteers. Our students who miss the additional support of a math coach or reading specialist, will not have a private tutor to make up the lessons lost. The resources that are provided by the school system are not only expected, but necessary for the success of many students in our Cluster.

The schools of the Kennedy Cluster ask that you consider this in making your budget decisions. When looking at the budgetary options, our Principals and parents hold the following to be of their highest priority, the things that they would not want to lose from their schools.

- Additional staffing provided as Focus schools – Our focus schools face similar situations and challenges as Title I schools, but without the federal support. The smaller class-sizes and additional support staff are needed in these schools to provide an effective learning environment.
- Intervention and resource teachers
- ESOL resources – As one of the diverse areas in Montgomery County, our schools have a high population of students who do not speak English as their first language. Furthermore, the ESOL teachers have the challenge of having students of many various languages in one school, ranging from Farsi to Chinese, Korean to Spanish. In Bel Pre Elementary, 43% of the students are enrolled in the ESOL program – almost 3 times the county average.
- Special Education resources – The needs of student requiring special education do not fluctuate with our economy. We cannot tell a child with dyslexia or a hearing disability or physical disability that they will have to be patient and wait until the economy gets better. Our schools have between 8.6% to almost 15% of student receiving special education. This is a sensitive population of students that we cannot shortchange.
- Highly qualified teachers –These are our master sculptors. Our teachers that have gone the extra steps for additional training and learning and are excelling at their craft. In an area where so much is needed, we cannot afford to lose our best.
- Reading specialists, math content specialists – These are the fundamentals of all learning. If there is nothing else that a child learns in school, he must learn to read at an appropriate level

for his age and grade, he must learn to understand mathematics and problem-solving commensurate with his ability. Each day, we tell our children how important it is to read 20 minutes a day and to learn their multiplication facts. But we cannot expect our children to learn these skills on their own. We, as a county, must provide the resources needed to teach these fundamentals.

- Middle School Magnet Consortium staffing – magnet coordinators, signature program staffing – The MSMC is constantly threatened with the loss of staffing, transportation, and resources. But we have to ask ourselves, what is a magnet consortium if we do not have a signature program, if we do not have specialized teachers, if we do not have transportation to bring students to school. When the MSMC was designed, there was a purpose, a goal in mind to increase diversity while increasing achievement. When the budget gets tight, it doesn't mean that we cut the resources that are at the heart of our programs, or else we lose that program and its value all together.

The Principals of the Kennedy Cluster need these tools to provide an effective instructional program, to meet AYP and continue to close the achievement gap that despite the current economic uncertainty, must still remain a priority of MCPS. Our students need these resources so that they can achieve their potential.

This school system has often been cited as one of the best in the area and the state of Maryland. Maryland has been held up as one of the best school systems in the country. Some of our schools lead the area in SAT, ACT, and AP exam scores. In such a great school system, all, not just some of the schools should be great and all the children should have the opportunity to succeed. In the Kennedy Cluster, we are asking that you consider not only the overall budget that a school needs, but the actual resources students needs to learn and achieve.

The King Memorial will be a monument to dreams and hopes and strength. MCPS has over 140,000 blocks from which to create its own monuments. Let our children be representatives of education and the future. Let them be monuments of dreams and hopes and strength. Help them to be monuments of greatness.

Thank you.

	<b>MCPS</b>	<b>Kennedy Cluster</b>
<b>Students receiving free &amp; reduced-price meals (FARMS)</b>	30.7	56.8
<b>Students ever receiving FARMS</b>	40.9	68.3
<b>English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)</b>	13	19.8
<b>Students receiving special education services</b>	11.9	12.2
<b>Enrollment</b>	144,064	4541