

FY 2012 Operating Budget Testimony
Poolesville Cluster

Donna Lowell
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Good evening. My name is Donna Lowell and tonight I am here to share the Poolesville Cluster's comments and priorities for the FY 2012 Operating Budget. The Poolesville Cluster supports the proposed Operating Budget and the MCCPTA Operating Budget Priorities. Through hardship and reduction, we must remain focused and maintain spending priorities that advance the education of the children that attend the public schools of Montgomery County. We understand that this isn't easy during a challenging economy.

We were happy to see that the operating budget states that FY2012 reductions won't affect school based services. We also recognize though that losing Central Office Positions can have ripple effects on the classrooms. And while the presentation of the Operating Budget, gives many views of the numbers, even with the great enhancements that have been made in the presentation over the last few years, we still find it difficult to identify line item cuts that don't directly impact student instruction without intimate knowledge of the numbers and how they are actually implemented within the school system. Thus, we can only speak generally to our priorities as they might impact Poolesville Cluster schools.

The schools in the Poolesville Cluster are smaller than many schools in Montgomery County. We seek your continued support for all three magnet houses at Poolesville High School and we pledge our continued support to delivering quality results. It is impressive that so many of the high schools in MCPS rank in the nation's top 100 schools by Newsweek and in other polls, but even more impressive is that Poolesville High School ranked 59th in the country, the second highest ranked MCPS high school.

Our Cluster Schools, like other small schools nestled in the county, had less to begin with prior to the cuts for the 2011 budget. The reading initiative at Poolesville Elementary School (PES) was decimated. I have seen firsthand the impacts this has had at Poolesville Elementary School. The size of reading groups has grown and there are more reading groups than can be seen in one school day. This is especially detrimental for beginning readers.

The classroom teachers and staff at these schools are working with less and still being asked to have the students perform at the same levels as previous years. There will be a point where this level of achievement won't be able to be maintained. This is not the fault of the classroom teacher, the school staff, the parent or the student.

The Poolesville Cluster appreciates the extra school staff that the high school receives which makes it possible to offer specialized courses or smaller class sizes. This compensates for the lower number of students. It would be difficult to provide those specialized magnet classes without that extra staff.

Along with MCCPTA we believe that the hours based staffing for special education students not be decreased. There are staff that work with children within the cluster with various disabilities including autism. If these positions are lost or partially removed those children that were able to function highly within Montgomery County Public schools will be hit hard.

We also appreciate that the FY 2012 budget does not decrease the dollar amount spent on each student. We hope that the size of classes will not be increased any further for any school within MCPS. We look forward to a time when class sizes can again be reduced. The new integrated elementary school curriculum being heralded for MCPS will not be effective without adequate staff to implement it. We again stress this year that as the budget gets tighter and staff allocations are reconsidered, that the outcome

of enrollment-based decisions continue to be scrutinized for smaller schools to ensure that the resulting decision does not unintentionally impact programming unfairly. We must continue to offer the same core curriculum and services to all MCPS students, regardless of school size.

We remain concerned that textbook and instructional supply money will again be cut this year. These accounts were slashed by 30% last year, and an additional freeze on furniture and equipment could make it difficult to purchase all the items staff would need to adequately cover their educational needs resulting in adjustments in teaching agendas and plans.

In the coming months difficult decisions will have to be made. The Poolesville Cluster supports the Superintendent's recommended Operating Budget, and we appreciate the sacrifices everyone continues to make and to that end we will participate fully with MCCPTA to ensure we receive the funding we need to support this budget. We thank all of you for the time and effort to ensure the quality of education of Montgomery County students remains high.