

Richard Montgomery High School Cluster
Testimony before the Board of Education on the
Fiscal Year 2012 Superintendent's Recommended Operating Budget
Wednesday, January 19, 2011
Presented by Christopher Kelly, Cluster Coordinator

Good evening. My name is Chris Kelly and I am one of the Richard Montgomery Cluster Coordinators, along with Cheryl Peirce and Cheryl Moss Herman.

I am speaking tonight on behalf of the PTSAs of Richard Montgomery High School and Julius West Middle School, and the PTAs of Beall, College Gardens, Ritchie Park, and Twinbrook Elementary Schools.

The RM Cluster is a model of excellence and diversity, drawing families from across the county to take advantage of our tri-level IB program and Chinese Immersion program. Ours truly is a great place for families to live and send their child to school.

This is reflected by our support for the Fiscal Year 2012 Superintendent's Recommended Operating Budget, which we urge the Board to approve; we ask that you carefully consider the MCCPTA Operating Budget Priorities Resolution presented to you last Wednesday by MCCPTA President Kristin Tribble. We would like to highlight a few of those priorities that have particular resonance for the RM Cluster.

Academic intervention, focus, reading, ESOL, special program teachers such as the IB MYP Coordinator, and staff development teachers are vital partners in education in the RM Cluster. They are critical to ensuring quality classroom teaching, helping to address the different challenges at each school and for providing needed support to individual children.

The potential loss of such positions would restrict the ability of our schools to provide student interventions essential towards making strides in math and reading, and hinder the ability to offer challenges for those who are ready. Moreover, allowing each school to use these positions flexibly also helps to ensure that each school's changing needs are met.

Staff development positions are part of the backbone of support in our schools. In addition to maintaining ongoing professional training and providing guidance to those staff who would benefit the most by it, the staff development positions also play a key role in our IB program.

As MCPS endeavors to roll out its Elementary Integrated Curriculum, the staff development person and other training materials and technology are ESSENTIAL to ensuring the success of this program. Access to technology varies dramatically from school to school in our cluster. A quick rollout of the new curriculum and changes related to meeting the Common Core Standards, without the needed investment in training our teachers (and technology), makes a challenging shift in the curriculum that much more difficult.

We fully support the MCCPTA resolution that argues for no additional increase in class sizes. We fear that staff, especially the specialists we talked about earlier, may be stretched to the point where services offered to students in our most crowded schools could suffer. Some of our four over-capacity elementary schools have high FARM rates and a large ESOL population.

These schools have especially great challenges. We fear that increased class size, coupled with potentially limited other supports, would severely impact learning opportunities for those who struggle, and could impede the identification of and opportunities for enrichment for those who are not obviously struggling.

The RM Cluster, with an elementary school utilization rate expected to rise to over 130% by 2012, also has some special building challenges. Most of its buildings are in need of updating. Portable classrooms are common, and, under the best scenarios, capital budget solutions are years away. In the meantime, we must continue to maintain all our facilities.

Yet our building services staff – whose numbers have been reduced – work with equipment that in some cases requires more time to repair than to use. They deal with the effects of overcrowded hallways, extended lunch periods, and end-of-day cleaning assignments in portable classrooms outside the main structure. They cannot continue to maintain our buildings even at their lowest standards with any more reductions.

Maintenance equipment, staff, and systems must be a priority – for the health of the buildings as well as the health of our children and staff.

Security must also be a priority: Rockville is densely populated and vehicles increasingly use neighborhood streets to avoid main thoroughfares. Yet some schools still wait for the new access control system, with surveillance cameras and remote-controlled locks. Those that have the system report frequent malfunctions. In these same schools, young children travel by key card through side and rear doors from portable classrooms to main buildings, with no line of sight from the main building in some cases, and no camera trained on them. Funding must be maintained to ensure a safe and secure environment for our students.

We close with the thought that equal cuts across the County will inevitably have unequal impacts. Some parents and parent groups will have the time, education and means to address losses and supplement needs, but many will not.

Let us not lose sight of the obvious – these budget decisions have real impacts on quality learning and teaching in our classrooms. In order to thrive, they need care and feeding and we stand ready to work with you in Rockville and Annapolis to ensure that our shared objectives are met.