

Seneca Valley Cluster

Testimony before the Board of Education on the Superintendent's Recommended FY 2012 Operating Budget

The Seneca Valley Cluster, in Germantown, is comprised of 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 and Waters Landing Elementary School.

We would like to ask that the board approve the Superintendent's Recommended Operating Budget for FY2012 as it has been presented.

As a cluster we are aware of the dire financial situation that is facing MCPS and Montgomery County as a whole. We know that some changes to the budget are possible before it is finalized in June so we have identified a few areas out of many that will severely impact our cluster if they are changed from the proposed budget.

Staff Development

Seneca Valley High School is now in its first year of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program and we expect the IB program to transform the academic footprint of the Seneca Valley Cluster over the coming years. However Seneca Valley High School also has a very successful, internationally recognized Academies program and for both of the programs to continue on their successful paths we need to place an emphasis on Staff Development and Staff Development teachers specifically. Over the past two years we have already lost crucial staff development resources and to lose any more of these supports will be detrimental to our staff, to our students and most of all to our IB and Academies programs.

At Martin Luther King, Jr Middle School we still do not have the Middle Years Programme to help us prepare our students for the rigors of IB. This lack of support places a premium on our Staff Development personnel as they attempt to do more with less. MLK cannot afford to lose a single hour of Staff Development resources if our students are going to be properly prepared for high school.

With the rollout of the Elementary Integrated Curriculum all of our elementary schools are concerned that any reduction in Staff Development will be detrimental to a successful rollout and program implementation. If our staff is not properly trained or supported our students will not be getting the best that we have to offer them.

Class Size

All of our elementary schools are focus schools and a premium is placed on classroom size. With our high FARM rates and large ESOL population we have many students that are considered at risk and need every bit of one-on-one time we can give them. Currently all of our K-2 classrooms are at or over capacity. Any increase in class size will impact

our math and reading specialist ability to help our most needy students. As a cluster we would like to see these focus school class sizes reduced to better help our at risk population in their most formative years.

Building Services

We all know that Seneca Valley High School is on the Modernization Schedule, but that is years away. In the meantime we need to keep our older schools running and any cuts to building services staff would be problematic at best. Many of our schools have some type of HVAC issue, be it the boiler at Lake Seneca Elementary, HVAC controllers and thermostats at Waters Landing Elementary and Seneca Valley High or the chiller at Roberto Clemente Middle School. Any reduction in staff could lead to increased school closings as was the case when the boiler failed in December at Lake Seneca and all of the elementary students had to be sent home. Make due with less seems to be the motto amongst our building services staff and this was very evident in December when MLK Middle School won the Comptroller of Maryland's "Silver Hammer" award. This is an award set up by the State Comptroller for "doing more with less" during these fiscally constrained times.

Central Office

The Seneca Valley Cluster does not think enough is said about the help that the central office provides to our schools. The training support and the hardware support the Office of Technology provides to our staffs have been priceless in the past and would be difficult to work without in the future. Every principal was very thankful for all the guidance and support that is available to them with just a phone call. Be it personnel issues, student services, school improvement, or curriculum.

Safety

Nothing has highlighted our budget difficulties like the loss of the EFO program. This 10 year program was cut last year and replaced with a trimmed down SRO program. This program change has created a "Perception is Reality" issue among our schools. There seems to be an increase in bullying at the elementary and middle school level and an increase in fighting at the high school level. Thus with an increase in MCPD activity at our schools we have to believe that incidents are up and that is related to the loss of school EFOs. MCPS and MCPD have to continue to work together to create a more secure environment for our students and staff.

As a cluster we recognize the fiscal situation facing both the county and the schools. We support the MCCPTA Operating Budget Priorities and would like to tell the Board "That Maryland needs to remain number one in education, and through support of the MCCPTA Operating Budget Priorities, Seneca Valley Cluster believes we will continue to be number one in the country."