

MCPS Operating Budget Testimony

FY 2012

On behalf of Sherwood Cluster

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. My name is Virginia Twombly and I am a co-cluster coordinator speaking tonight on behalf of the Sherwood Cluster. I had the opportunity to attend the budget forum last Monday and I made every effort to take what was said by the Board of Education members and the County Council members back to the Sherwood Cluster. Everyone is well aware of the dire economic conditions that the school system, the county, the state and, indeed, the entire government is facing this year. I don't envy you your job this year – to provide what is necessary to continue the world-class education that our county demands and depends on – with less money.

I will not tell you what we think is ok to cut out of the budget because that is not the job of an advocate. I can only tell you what is of vital importance to the children, parents, teachers and administrators of Sherwood. We have participated in the county level efforts to create budget priorities. After considering the multitude of concerns that MCPS deals with every day, we fully support the five or six listed items in the MCCPTA Budget resolution.

Our reading and math intervention teachers do an extraordinary job being flexible to meet kids needs that change every day. These teachers are constantly monitoring the progress and growth of individual students and adapting to meet their needs. Flexible groups, extra skill practice, individual or small group attention – whatever is needed, these teachers step in and get it done. As do the Special Education teachers who take up the extraordinary job of differentiating and providing all of our students with access to a rigorous curriculum.

The counselors in our cluster meet so many needs, solve so many problems, provide so much support that it is impossible to measure their success– unless they aren't there. It's hard to measure fights that don't happen, problems resolved without heartache, students accepted to colleges they'd hadn't known of or scholarships that wouldn't have been applied for. You all know how difficult this economy is to deal with – stresses about money – and we have college degrees and years of maturity. The effects of economic stress on families and children who don't know how to handle it can be overwhelming. How do you measure the benefit of grief counseling after a child's life has ended too soon, how do you measure the benefits of support when a father succumbs to cancer, when a mother is deployed, when a sibling contracts a serious illness? We need counselors to help students find the peace of mind that will enable them to absorb the skills and knowledge our teachers are trying to instill.

The teachers in the Sherwood Cluster are among the finest, most creative and most dedicated anywhere in the world. They volunteer hours and hours of their own time every week to create opportunities for kids to be enriched above and beyond the curriculum as well as working with those students who are struggling. It is often the teachers who go to administration and say, “Let’s have a drama club and put on a play”. And the administrators of our schools do everything in their power to figure out a way to make it work. Every parent in my cluster is grateful for the teachers who work so hard to enrich, enlighten and entice children to be the best they can be.

Last year MCPS Board of Education members were placed in the difficult position of having to make further cuts to the budget than originally planned. It seemed to me that every effort was made to minimize the impacts to students and spread the pain of these cuts across the board neither sparing nor penalizing any particular group. This year, when faced with the difficult decisions that are on the horizon – please keep staff and programs maintained as much as possible.

Thank you for your willingness to listen to our concerns.

Sincerely,

Virginia Twombly

Co-cluster Coordinator

Sherwood Cluster