

Watkins Mill Cluster
Watkins Mill High School.
Montgomery Village Middle School; Neelsville Middle School
South Lake ES; Stedwick ES; Watkins Mill ES; Whetstone ES

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Testimony presented by:
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Good evening President Barclay, Dr. Weast, and members of the Board of Education. My name is Martha Crews, and I'm a Cluster Coordinator for Watkins Mill. I am also the PTSA President at Watkins Mill HS.

Let me start by saying that the Watkins Mill Cluster fully supports the Operating Budget testimony delivered by Kristin Tribble, and we thank her for her leadership as we all work to advocate during these difficult fiscal times. Furthermore, our cluster supports the priorities in MCCPTA's Operating Budget Priorities Resolution, and we urge the Board of Education to be diligent in protecting these items as tough budget decisions are made.

I would also like to thank you for giving us this dedicated opportunity to speak for the schools we represent, each and every year. This year is an especially difficult one to be advocating for our needs given the dire budget climate. So when you are making the tough decisions on where and how these precious, limited funds will be spent, we'd like you to consider the needs of students like those in our cluster – those who are often the least fortunate and whose parents lack the resources to provide them with the extra resources they require.

In the Watkins Mill cluster, our most significant concerns are increased class size and the loss of key, specialized staff.

Our cluster continues to experience some of the highest rates in the county for mobility, ESOL, and FARMS. At WMHS, the FARMS rate is 39.3% and mobility is 15.5%; collectively at our elementary schools, the FARMS are over 50%, ESOL is over 28% and mobility over 13%. In spite of these rates, our schools have been very successful. The continued success our schools have achieved becomes dependent upon the presence of the personnel necessary to support students working with these challenges; specifically, our Academic Intervention, Reading Specialist, and ESOL teachers as well as our Counselors at the elementary level. These

personnel not only allow our schools to effectively teach children in those categories, but also are key to the differentiated instruction in the classroom that insures that gifted students are challenged at the appropriate levels as well. With an increased class size and reduction of specialized staff, it will be near to impossible to effectively teach our students with the poverty, mobility and ESOL levels as those in our cluster. Staff will be in “management” and “security” mode. Of great concern to us is what happens when these key staff members are gone. How will our at-need students receive the specialized instruction that they need? Often, the parents don’t speak English or are holding down two jobs and simply just don’t have the resources to help their own children. And when these specialized staff members are gone, how will the classroom teachers be able to effectively meet the needs of all students? Another staffing issue occurs at recess. At one of our elementary schools, we have two staff members overseeing 100 children at recess, making it difficult to ensure their well-being.

Our other concern is in reference to class size. It may seem on the surface that an increase of one student per class is really just nominal. But is it? Consider the case at Watkins Mill HS:

The IB program is flourishing and is the cornerstone of the instructional program, with great promise for the future. As all of you are aware, WMHS has been extremely successful in creating a very strong IB program. One of the dilemmas in running a successful IB program is offering the full pathway of courses that allows students to earn their IB diploma in two years.

Often, staffing needs of the IB program are not met by the typical enrollment-driven staffing formula, as there is often a need to run multiple sections of classes that may operate below capacity. For example, if there are 35 students in the IB Diploma Program in 11th grade, all of whom require certain courses, the school is faced with the dilemma of running a single class of 35, or two sections with an average class size of 17.5. If too many of the “singletons” are in the schedule, there are inevitably class period conflicts that result in students not being able to take the classes they need. This then implores the school to offer the second section with an average size of 17.5, which is not factored into the staffing formula.

This past year, the school was able to make things work by allowing other classes to operate at capacity, and by taking advantage of specialized staffing such as the IB coordinator and academic intervention teachers. However, if there were any further staffing cuts in class size, or to support positions like academic intervention in this budget, it would be devastating to the IB program and potentially result in students not being able to enroll in all of the courses they need to complete their IB diploma.

And, of course, our IB program would thrive if we had a Middle Years Programme at a feeder middle school, as all other IB programs created before Watkins Mill enjoy. We are painfully

aware that there is no funding for this, but we continue to hold out hope that when our budget situation improves, the school board will place this among the top of its priorities.

Even though I know it is not necessary, given your commitment to ALL children in Montgomery County, I will ask you to please remember the least fortunate students as you deliberate the budget, those students whose parents won't be able to pick up the slack as funding is cut. I wish you luck, and I thank you for listening.