

Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster

Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School
Westland Middle School
Bethesda Elementary School
Chevy Chase Elementary School
North Chevy Chase Elementary School
Rock Creek Forest Elementary School
Somerset Elementary School
Westbrook Elementary School
Rosemary Hills Primary School

TESTIMONY

Before the Board of Education

FY 2013 Operating Budget

January 18, 2012

Good evening, President Brandman, Vice President Barclay, Distinguished Members of the Board of Education and Dr. Starr. My name is Lynn King and I am one of the Bethesda-Chevy Chase (B-CC) Cluster Coordinators, along with Craig Brown and Mary Cobbett. I am grateful to have this opportunity to share our priorities with you tonight on the FY 2013 Operating Budget for Montgomery County Public Schools.

Overview

We fully recognize that for the last few years, the Board has had to make some very challenging decisions regarding the funding of our children's education and we respect that difficult times may still be on the horizon. However, the year-after-year cuts combined with the incredible growth of our student population has created a pressure cooker situation in our cluster. We need a release valve and we need it now.

This is particularly evident in our cluster which has over **6,650 students (3,623 of which are elementary school children)**; we are at or **over capacity** in all of our schools and understaffed to support the increased student population. This year, our cluster's **enrollment grew by over 4%** (county pre-K ó 12 enrollment increased 2%) and we anticipate continued growth over the next few years. Unfortunately, the last four years of school budget cuts during a time when our

student population continued to grow beyond projected enrollments has taken a toll on our children and our teachers via overcrowded classrooms, reduced support staff (e.g. ESOL teachers, counselors, paraeducators), and eliminated special programs. Our children should not be punished due to the fact that our cluster experienced population growth. It is a basic right that our citizens should have, the ebb and flow of our population shouldn't change the quality of our education.

The B-CC cluster stands behind MCCPTA's recommendation to support the Superintendent's proposed budget. However, we can't help but wonder if the 2% (\$41 million) increase over last year's budget, which as you know is the lowest requested increase in more than a decade, is enough to repair the damage caused by the significant cumulative cuts over the last few years. Savings via efficiencies can only go so far. It will not reduce the class size or re-hire academic intervention teachers. While we appreciate the Superintendent's maintenance of effort request for FY 2013, the simple fact remains that if the proposed budget is adopted, MCPS will be spending less per student next year than it did in FY 2011.

The State of the Cluster

The B-CC cluster wholeheartedly supports MCCPTA's position that, in order to ensure the success of every student, there can be no further increase in class size and no further reduction of staff that provide direct instruction or support to students. We appreciate that the Superintendent's proposed budget appears to be in line with our position of "protecting the classroom" and hope that when we return to a more robust economy, a reduction in class size will be back on the table.

As you know, MCPS regulations establish class sizes at 22-23 students per classroom for K-5/6 and 25 students per classroom for middle school and high school. I only wish this were true at my son's school, Rosemary Hills Primary School (grades K-2), where his **1st grade class** (one of **eight 1st grade classes at the school**) has **26 children**. This year, due to overcrowding and over capacity at Rosemary Hills, the reading initiative teacher has been allocated a space in the staff lounge for her lessons and some teachers have their **reading groups in the hall**. Furthermore, due to the projected increase of kindergarten students at Rosemary Hills next year, there is a

distinct possibility that the primary school will need **three days for kindergarten orientation**. The impact on students is that current kindergarteners would have to miss three days of school (instead of two) to allow time for incoming students to be registered.

Somerset Elementary School (K-5) has also experienced a significant growth of students. Over the last four years, the school has seen its enrollment increase by over 32%. To better illustrate the impact of the increased enrollment in the classroom, consider that for the 2007-2008 school year, the average class size for 4th grade at Somerset was 20.5. Last year, Somerset's 4th grades averaged 25.3 students ó **five additional students per class in four years**. Please see Exhibit 1 for detailed 2011-2012 enrollment projections and **2011-2012 actual enrollment numbers** (as of January 2012) for all the B-CC cluster schools.

Overcrowding is also a significant problem at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School. Due to high enrollment numbers, most classes are at capacity. The negative impact on students is that there is very little flexibility for schedule modifications once the semester has begun. In high school, it is not unusual for a teacher to discover in the first weeks of classes that a student would be better served in a different type or level of class. The overcrowded classrooms at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School make schedule changes very challenging for both the students and teachers.

The issue of overcrowding was raised at the "Listen and Learn" session the Superintendent held in our cluster on November 16, 2011 (Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School). In response to parental concerns about class sizes, Dr. Starr commented it was more important to make sure the MCPS hired, retained, and trained excellent teachers. We recognize that this proposed budget reflects that philosophy by including funds for step and longevity increases for eligible MCPS employees. The B-CC cluster wholeheartedly supports this allocation especially in light of the fact that teachers and school support staff have gone without cost of living increases for the last three years and steps and longevity increases for the last two years.

We also support the Superintendent's focus on professional development and agree that, over time, such an investment will have a positive impact on our students. Immediately, however, we urge the Board of Education and the Superintendent to continue to examine the impact of today's

classroom overcrowding on our students. Is the kindergartener at Rosemary Hills who is struggling with her reading skills really benefiting by having a learning group size of four or five children for one specialist? Don't we owe her more? Education researchers note that larger classes in elementary grades negatively impact a child's learning outcomes. This stems from the fact that the more students per teacher, the less time for individual interaction. Dr. Frederick Mosteller, a highly regarded Harvard University statistician, concluded in his renowned *Tennessee Study of Class Size in the Early School Grades* that "[h]aving fewer children in class reduces the distractions in the room and gives the teacher more time to devote to each child."¹ Dr. Mosteller also noted that the negative impact of classroom overcrowding "for minorities was about double that for majorities."²

Hours-based Staffing at Westland Middle School

As I am sure you are aware, hours-based staffing is a MCPS program that provides equitable and appropriate staffing of special education teachers and paraeducators based on the total number of direct instructional service hours on student Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). According to MCPS Office of Special Education and Student Services, the hours-based staffing model addresses the individualized instructional needs of students and provides resources for more flexible programming options such as co-teaching and supported general education classes, as well as special classes for students who may require this level of instructional support. Hours-based staffing supports the provision of special education services within neighborhood schools rather than in segregated settings.

Hours-based staffing is in place in every elementary school in the B-CC cluster and we support the program's continued funding in the FY 2013 proposed budget. Hours-based staffing is also in place in 32 of the 38 middle schools in Montgomery County. Westland Middle School, which has over 130 students with IEPs (**a more than 60% increase over the last four years**), is one of the seven county middle schools that currently does not have an hours-based staffing program. While B-CC cluster wholeheartedly supports the FY 2013 operating budget recommendation to

¹ http://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/docs/05_02_08.pdf

² *Id.*

allocate \$170,000 for the first of a three year phase in for hours-based staffing, we strongly urge you to increase this earmark and fully fund hours-based staffing in **all of the seven remaining schools next year.**

Changing Needs of our Cluster's Students

Students with special needs in our cluster function under extraordinary circumstances. Annual budget cuts have led to reduced staff, larger class sizes and in some cases, reduced instructional programs. When you consider the **growth of our cluster, which is double than that countywide**, with the significant range of needs of students who qualify for special education, and 504 plans you can easily imagine how important it is for the B-CC cluster to urge your attention to the negative impact of budget cuts on these children.

Westland Middle school is a very good example of the widening range of unique needs of students. Westland currently has a number of students with an autism spectrum disorder (both high-functioning and students with Asperger's), students with vision and hearing impairments, emotional disabilities, intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities (cerebral palsy), and students identified as other health impaired (typically ADHD). Westland also has students who are medically fragile and require paraprofessionals for support throughout the entire school day. Westland manages with only seven full-time special education teachers and nine paraeducators on staff (no part time special education or paraeducators). The cluster advocates that, as the complexity of students with special needs and 504 plans continue to increase, so should the number of specialized teachers and support staff.

Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School is also seeing a growing population of students with impairments and/or disabilities. Over the last three years, B-CC High School has experienced an almost 50% increase in the number of students qualifying for 504 plans. This has created a huge challenge for counselors and teachers. While number B-CC's 504 plan students has increased significantly over the last few years, the number of guidance counseling staff has unfortunately remained stagnant. Guidance counselors spend countless hours with 504 plan students, their

parents, and their teachers, facilitating scheduling accommodations and evaluating implementation of organizational and study strategies. If 504 plan students do not have counselors to advise them the available resources to help advance academically, who will?

When it comes to implementing Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, the B-CC cluster stands behind MCPS's mission as stated in its 2011 handbook: "The future of our schools depends on the ability of a well-trained, committed, and caring workforce. Teachers must be able to teach all students if all students are to learn. **All instructional staff must be equipped to use a wide repertoire of instructional strategies to respond appropriately to diverse student needs.**"³ We urge you to consider the situation of the growing number of 504 plan students at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School together with the school's limited number of counselors and then ask yourself, "Is MCPS living up to its Section 504 mission?"

Sixth Grade Program at Elementary Schools

The impact of overcrowding on middle school children is illustrated by the fact that, due to capacity issues at our cluster's only middle school (Westland), two of our six elementary schools (Chevy Chase Elementary School and North Chevy Chase Elementary School) include grade 6.

Currently, there are **nearly 200 6th graders at Chevy Chase Elementary School and North Chevy Chase Elementary**, which is almost half of all 6th graders in the cluster. Parents of children that matriculate to Chevy Chase and North Chevy Chase elementary schools remain concerned the gains their program has made to provide basic education parity with Westland Middle School will be negatively impacted if funding is cut in FY 2013. Last year, a consequence of the reduced funds per student was decreased academic support for our 6th grade elementary school programs. We urge you restore our per student funding to the FY 2011 level or, at a minimum, not make any further cuts in FY 2013.

The majority of Rosemary Hills Primary School students matriculate to Chevy Chase and North Chevy Chase elementary schools and we do not see the enrollment numbers declining. In fact, the opposite is true – enrollment continues to surpass MCPS projections. Last year, MCPS

³ <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/studentservices/pdf/504/handbook504.pdf>

projected Rosemary Hills enrollment to be 667. As of January 11, 2012, **Rosemary Hills Primary School had 701 students enrolled (216 kindergarteners, 213 1st graders 214 2nd graders, and 58 pre-kindergarten and pre-kindergarten autism children).** – MCPS underestimated by over 5%.

These current numbers and the certain enrollment growth at the K-2 grade level in our cluster continue to put pressure on our only middle school's program capacity. The B-CC cluster applauds your recognition of the critical need for a new middle school to help manage our dramatic enrollment growth, alleviate overcrowding at Westland Middle School, and finally, to give 6th graders at Chevy Chase and North Chevy Chase elementary schools the opportunity for a true middle school education. Further, we urge the Board and the Superintendent to do everything in your power to not delay the construction of the new school to ensure its doors are open in August 2017.

Every so often, I remind my young son of something Mohandas Ghandi once said, "be the change that you want to see in the world." As I stand here before you tonight, I passionately request that, if you want our children to advance academically and go on to positively impact our society, you be the change right here, right now. Change the proposed operating budget to increase the per pupil funding, implement hours-based staffing at all seven schools next year and increase the number of teachers and support staff in our cluster to relieve overcrowded classrooms. On behalf of the B-CC cluster, I thank you for your time and we look forward to working with you on the important issue of funding our children's education.

Bethesda-Chevy Chase Cluster

School	Program Capacity	Projected 2011-12 Enrollment	Actual 2011-12 Enrollment as of Jan. 2012
Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School	1,665	1,808	1,825
Westland Middle School	1,063	1,128	1,159
Bethesda Elementary School	384	483	500
Chevy Chase Elementary School	450	488	507
North Chevy Chase Elementary School	230	422	427
Rock Creek Forest Elementary School	310	571	579*
Rosemary Hills Primary School	477	667	701
Somerset Elementary School	515	545	502
Westbrook Elementary School	283	409	411

* As of November 2, 2011