

Kennedy Cluster

Bel Pre Elementary School
Georgian Frost Elementary School
Glenallan Elementary School
Strathmore Elementary School

Argyle Middle School
Lee Middle School
Kennedy High School

**Board of Education Hearings for
Recommended FY2013 MCPS Operating Budget
Wednesday, January 18, 2012**

As you have heard from the MCCPTA President and my fellow Cluster Coordinators, MCCPTA supports the Superintendent's proposed FY2013 budget at the required Maintenance of Effort level. On behalf of the Kennedy Cluster, we also ask that the Board of Education support this budget and recommend fully funding it for the success of our schools.

Over the past few years, in light of the fiscal challenges of our county, the state, and our nation overall, it has been necessary for our school system to make cuts in classroom and support staffing, arts education, and administrative leadership. We have seen our classrooms with a few more children, including our focus school Kindergarten classes. Where the advantages of smaller class sizes have been proven, especially in schools where children need more attention, we are pleased that class size has not increased in the proposed budget.

Looking at the long-term success of our students, the school system adopted the Seven Keys to College Readiness with the goal of making our graduates academically prepared for college. Every child should graduate with the tools and knowledge necessary to attend college or a trade school, or to join the military; one of these options is almost a requirement for success in our current economy. The Kennedy Cluster, therefore, supports Dr. Starr's proposed funding

(\$100,000) for the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program to be implemented at the middle school level.

In this modern age of 144-character limited communications, our children need to be encouraged and taught to read more rigorous texts and engage in complex thinking and writing. Further, they need to be taught how to study, how to manage their time, how to plan their work so that they can be successful in high school, and then college. According to research cited by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, less than a quarter of African Americans in the class of 2002 were college-ready; fewer Hispanics in the same class were prepared for the demands of college. Educational researchers have repeatedly said that the preparing for college does not begin in high school, it must begin in middle school. MCPS has gone even further by implementing elementary reading goals to set students along the pathway for their college preparedness. Given the demographics and academic challenges in our Cluster, we request that the AVID program be approved by the Board of Education and implemented by MCPS at Argyle M.S. to complement the Digital Design and Development magnet program.

The benefit of budget cuts is that they force a system to find the waste, the duplicity, the unnecessary spending that has accumulated over the years; to “trim the fat” as the saying goes. Budget cuts requires a system to run leaner and more efficiently. But unfortunately, the cuts do not necessarily occur without some damage to the system and there’s the possibility that the system will become complacent without some of the valuable components. We request that the factors for our success be returned to the budget as our fiscal situation improves.

Consider adding para-educators, math support and reading support where they have been lost. Our focus schools, Title I schools, and those with relatively higher FARMS and ESOL populations, are affected most when we reduce our support or academic intervention staff. Our populations continue to increase, our FARMS rate continue to grow, and the ESOL students continue to need language learning. When available, these students would benefit by the restoration of the staff that supports their success.

Consider increasing the MCPS allocation for classroom materials. Each time my daughter is assigned a book in English class, we go to Barnes & Nobles and buy a new copy because the collection at school is old and she's sure that she will lose some pages on the bus. When she lost her school copy of All Quiet on the Western Front and I asked if she were to send in the money for it, she said that the teacher would rather them turn in a new, store-bought copy to make sure that the book is replaced. If we are expecting our children to read and excel, we have to provide them quality tools with which to work.

Increase teacher training. For all our Promethean boards and electronic gadgetry, the thing that will last the longest and have the greatest impact on our students is well-trained teachers.

Imagine in your own home – yes, you could have a video of yourself reading a bedtime story to your kid, even 3D graphics to make it appear that you are tucking them in. Or you could have yourself there to actually be there for your child and let them know you are there. Let our children know we are there for them by training our teachers as highly, qualified educators.

It is much touted that Montgomery County is the number one school system in Maryland and Maryland has the number one school system in the country. In some measures, the state would drop to number 15 in the country if Montgomery County were not included in the Maryland statistics. This speaks to the strength and the quality of our school system and our leadership. Let us continue this level of excellence that has become synonymous with Montgomery County Public Schools and fund our Superintendent's proposed FY2013 budget.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,
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January 18, 2012