

**Testimony on the
Superintendent's Recommended FY 2013 Operating Budget
before the Montgomery County Board of Education**

January 18, 2012

**Richard Montgomery High School Cluster
*Richard Montgomery H.S. * Julius West M.S.
Beall E.S. * College Gardens E.S. * Ritchie Park E.S. * Twinbrook E.S.***

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MCCPTA Cluster Coordinators**

Presented by Cheryl Peirce

The Richard Montgomery Cluster supports the Superintendent's Recommended FY2013 Operating Budget, recognizing that it is a Maintenance of Effort budget set at the rebased level of nearly \$1500 less per student than only four years ago. We appreciate the work of Dr. Starr and his staff to focus our resources, to seek efficiencies, and to protect the school-based staff and supports that directly affect our students.

While each child in the Richard Montgomery Cluster is, of course, unique, our concerns, priorities, and challenges are not. With the rest of MCPS, our enrollment is skyrocketing, we are outgrowing our aging and our new buildings, our school neighborhoods are becoming more urban and our populations more diverse, the needs of our students and their families are rapidly increasing, and we know the world will ask different things of our students than it did a generation ago. We are a microcosm of the county as a whole. As a result, we support the testimony, in its entirety, of MCCPTA President Kristen Triple.

The Richard Montgomery Cluster is concerned about the loss of staff hours for guidance counselors, reading and media specialists, para-educators, and staff development. Our students feel the loss of after school activities and the transportation that allowed for greater access to them. We, too, are concerned about the safety and security of our students, as the youngest of them are outside the main buildings in our twenty elementary portable classrooms, and as Twinbrook waits at least ten years for modernization while its reduced building services staff and MCPS maintenance continue to "MacGyver" the building together.

If we as a cluster had to call out one specific point from the MCCPTA testimony, it would be the need for staff development. With the roll-out of Curriculum 2.0, alignment of K-12 with the Common Core Standards, special education inclusion, increased ESOL

needs, International Baccalaureate at three levels, and now the possibility of the introduction of the AVID system, amid growing FARMS populations and a focus on differentiation within the classroom, we are asking a lot of our teachers, and the decreased number of para-educators available to assist them.

As part of your focus on professional development, we urge you to devote more attention to school leadership. Our principals, our administrators, are increasingly asked to “be creative” and motivate, direct, and evaluate dwindling staff through all of these changes, while engaging and communicating effectively with a diversifying student and parent population. We’re a demanding county, and we should be, but we must provide the supports necessary for success at all levels of our educational profession. Our students are counting on it.

As one of the most crowded clusters in the county, we do have some additional concerns that are likely shared with other crowded clusters. While most staff and resource allocation is tied to enrollment, some of the current formulas are insufficient. While we support all efforts to protect our classrooms from feeling the direct impacts of reductions, these problems crowd into our classrooms and add to the challenges our teachers face.

For example, our building services staffs cannot keep up with the needs of buildings that also require them to exit the main building to service portable classrooms, wooden hallways, and exterior walkways. There is a big difference between caring for a new modern facility with necessary service equipment areas, and trying to care for a building that is deteriorating, has multiple unfortunate additions, lacks an elevator to a lower level, and also includes portable classrooms, which is the case at Twinbrook.

Lunch and playground supervision is another example. Three staff members for 160 students may be sufficient when there is room for each student at a table or when the playground space has clear sight lines. It is woefully inadequate when students are elbowing one another for room, are eating in shifts, and recess space has been cut up to make room for portable classrooms. As most of you know, the inability of five to eleven year olds to stretch, run, and eat directly affects their classroom experiences.

Finally, front office staff allocation is not tied to enrollment and our elementary staffs in our over-capacity schools are overburdened. They are handling the needs of staff members and an increasing numbers of students and trying to assist more parents, many through language barriers, while simultaneously navigating the daily vagaries of the new security systems.

The Richard Montgomery Cluster includes a Title I school and a former Focus school, so we would also like to address implementation of the operating budget and draw your attention to the need to better transition schools out of Focus and Title I status. We

understand these decisions are driven by federal funding decisions and that complicates the time frames, but when making operating budget decisions, it's important to consider the impact sudden shifts will have.

This year, Beall Elementary School is no longer a Focus school, not because its students' needs have dramatically decreased but because the needs of students in other schools have so rapidly increased. Beall's K-2 teachers saw their class sizes increase by about five students and simultaneously lost the support staff allocated by Focus teacher hours. A twenty-five percent increase is a pretty big adjustment to make from June to August. We wonder whether this process could be done more gradually, even over a two-year period.

Twinbrook Elementary School lost its Title I status as the school year ended, again more as a result of needs increases in other schools, and had regained it by the start of this school year. That made planning a little complicated and resulted in the cancellation of its summer Extended Learning Opportunities program, despite the apparent continued need for it. If Twinbrook had transitioned from Title I to Focus, that still would have been a more gradual process than Beall experienced.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify on the proposed operating budget for FY2013. We urge you to adopt this budget. With your leadership we will do all we can to support full funding from the county and state. Thank you.