

Churchill Cluster Testimony
Regarding the County Executive's
Recommended
FY 2011 Operating Budget

Winston Churchill Cluster

Winston Churchill High School
Herbert Hoover Middle School
Beverly Farms Elementary School
Seven Locks Elementary School

Cabin John Middle School
Bells Mill Elementary School
Potomac Elementary School
Wayside Elementary School

Montgomery County Council Public Hearing
County Council Building
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Churchill Cluster Coordinators:
Laura Siegel
Merry Eisner
Laurie Halverson

Good Evening President Floreen, members of the County Council and County Executive Leggett. My name is Laura Siegel. I am one of the three MCCPTA Churchill Cluster Coordinators. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify on behalf of the eight schools that comprise the Churchill Cluster, regarding the County Executive's Recommended FY 2011 Operating Budget.

We are grateful that the County Executive did not propose the same severe budget cuts for MCPS that were recommended for other departments throughout the county. While we are well aware of the difficult economic climate affecting both the county and state we still urge the Council to continue funding education at the maximum level possible. Although a Maintenance of Effort budget may not be attainable this year, it must remain the goal for future years. If a state waiver is not granted then the Council must carefully weigh the burden of monetary penalties vs. fully funding a Maintenance of Effort budget as requested by the Board of Education.

According to *Forbes*, Potomac, MD is one of the "top education American small towns." The public schools in Potomac are listed in a *Forbes* online article (April 6, 2010) titled *Star Schools - The Best Schools for Your Housing Buck* from.¹ The Potomac area public schools are ranked fifth in the nation among areas with median home prices above \$800,000.² GreatSchools³ used factors such as high school graduation rates, percentage of college-bound students, AP course offerings, national and state standardized test scores, to determine the educational quality score discussed in their report. The academic excellence that contributes to the reputation of Potomac's Churchill Cluster Schools cannot be maintained without adequate financial support from the county. Nor can the county afford to let this reputation falter.

¹ Star Schools - The Best Schools for your Housing Buck
<http://www.forbes.com/2010/04/05/best-schools-for-your-housing-buck-business-beltway-greatschools.html>

² In Depth: America's 25 Best Schools For Your Housing Buck
http://www.forbes.com/2010/04/05/best-schools-for-your-housing-buck-business-beltway-greatschools_slide_6.html

³ Top Cities 2010
<http://www.greatschools.org/>

Our students will be adversely affected by increases in class size, elimination of special programs including Signature programs, which have already occurred at Churchill High School, and a reduction of extra-curricular activities offered both by MCPS and the Department of Recreation. All of these factors contribute to the success of our students; therefore we are adamant that budget cuts do not adversely impact our children.

Although the Council is not responsible for setting policy for MCPS we are asking for your support. **Our first priority is to advocate strongly against Dr. Weast's recent recommendation to increase class size** by one student in order to cut \$16 million from the MCPS budget. Secondly, **we are opposed to any cuts that will adversely impact students.** Thirdly, **we want MCPS to reallocate Operating Budget dollars toward local school operations.** During this exceptionally lean economic period the County Council should insist that MCPS evaluate programs, initiatives, and spending levels to determine if whether or not MCPS is achieving a maximum return on investment.

The Churchill Cluster schools currently operate with a much lower expenditure per pupil and a minimal number of staff (See Table 1) as compared to other schools in the county. According to the *FY 2007 MCPS Schools at a Glance* (which is the last year that includes complete operating budget figures) the expenditure per pupil at Potomac Elementary School was \$7,348. This is **less than half** of the per pupil expenditure at Broad Acres Elementary School which equaled \$14,786.

The disparity in staffing and per pupil expenditure in our cluster schools clearly illustrates that our schools are operating with a minimal level of support and are stretched to the limit. The current "bare-bones" level of staffing and funding at our cluster schools does not include any excess. The current level of student achievement in the Churchill Cluster is becoming increasingly difficult to uphold and will become impossible with any further budget reductions.

Table 1 Increase in Student Enrollment vs. Increase in Staffing⁴

School	Student Enrollment			Total # of Staff		
	FY 2001	FY 2009	% Change	FY 2001	FY 2009	% Change
Churchill High School	1773	2110	19.0	166	196	18.0
Wheaton High School	1306	1320	1.1	143	169	18.0

Note that the enrollment at Churchill HS increased by 19% but the number of staff only increased by 18%; Wheaton HS enrollment increased only 1.1% over the same time period, but the staff increased 18%.

The Churchill Cluster has one Educational Facility Officer (EFO) for over 6500 students. We ask that the Council allocate funding to the Police Department to ensure the EFO positions continue for our cluster and those throughout MCPS.

CLASS SIZE MUST NOT BE INCREASED

Any increase in class size will have the following negative repercussions:

- Less staff in our schools due to larger class size
- Less opportunities for enrichment
- Decrease in the number of course offerings
- Less support for special education students - especially for students who are mainstreamed or those who are being forced out of special schools/programs which have specially trained staff who were able to support students with extreme special needs
- Lack of support for our Cluster's most at-risk students who currently do not benefit from supports found in other areas of the county
- Decrease in staff morale - caused by increase in workload.

Our parents, teachers and principals feel strongly that class size is a top priority.

In our cluster testimony before the Board of Education in January, we questioned the figures relating to class size that were reported in the Superintendent's Recommended Operating Budget for FY 2011. It is imperative that these figures accurately reflect the

⁴ MCPS FY 2001 and 2009 Schools at a Glance

situation in our cluster schools. The math in the *Superintendent's FY 2011 Recommended MCPS Operating Budget* does not add up (Chapter 1-24):

- *"The projected average class size for High School classes for FY 2011 is 25.7*
- *Class sizes for high school English classes are listed at 28 students and other classes are listed as 32 students."*

How can these figures average out to a much lower number of 25.7 students?

- Approximately 80% of the classes at Churchill High School have more than the "average number" of students this semester.
- Of the approximately 300 Honors and AP courses offered at Churchill, **almost all** have the maximum number of students.

The projected average class size is extremely misleading and certainly does not paint an accurate picture of class sizes at Churchill High School. Averages in general, do not accurately represent the facts. Adding one more student to a class of 32 or more is very different than adding one more student to a class of 25.7!

BUDGET CUTS MUST NOT ADVERSELY IMPACT STUDENTS

Since the County Executive has recommended against fully funding the budget submitted by the Board of Education, many of the proposed cuts suggested by Dr. Weast and Mr. Leggett will need to be instituted. These will adversely impact our students resulting in:

- **Increase in mental health issues experienced by students** - due to less time teachers will have to devote to individual students; the increase in the number of assessments is also a major concern as it relates to our students' mental health
- **Loss of Signature Programs and enrichment opportunities for our students** - Churchill High School students in the Signature Programs have already been impacted by cuts implemented in FY 2010 which we testified at great length about last year; Gifted and Talented (GT) instruction must continue to be offered at our elementary and middle schools

- **Decline in enrollment of enrichment programs at magnet schools** - if transportation is cut will lead to the overall demise of these programs
- **Less than adequate maintenance of buildings and portables** - five of our eight schools are awaiting modernization and need continued maintenance to ensure the health and safety of our students and staff; proper maintenance of MCPS holding schools is also essential - many Cabin John students and teachers are currently suffering at the Tilden Holding facility due to lack of a working air-condition system throughout many classrooms
- **Lack of supplies and instructional materials** - Students in Churchill's AP Spanish class have textbooks that can only be used in school, because there are not enough for each student to take home. The increased push for more students to enroll in AP courses must be met with an appropriate increase in textbooks and supplies for these courses.
- **Lack of after school activities/sports and Rec Extra Programs lead to lack of supervision** - providing opportunity for students to find trouble, and lose role models. Last year the Department of Recreation eliminated the Rec Extra Program from our two middle schools due to budget constraints. The popular Club Friday and After Hours programs for elementary and middle school students, held at the Potomac Community Center, are now in jeopardy due to the proposed elimination of staff and budget cuts.

REALLOCATE MCPS OPERATING BUDGET TO INCREASE FUNDS FOR LOCAL SCHOOL EXPENDITURES

Dollar for dollar, excellent classroom teachers will be more effective at having a positive influence on students versus most any other MCPS expenditure. MCPS must increase this budget category while reducing funding for other categories. MCPS risks losing our best teachers due to a decrease in job satisfaction caused by increasing workloads. MCPS also risks losing new teachers because the salary differential between our counties and others in the area is decreasing, while the cost of living in Montgomery County is among the highest in the area.

While comparing figures from the Superintendent's FY 2011 Recommended MCPS Operating Budget to prior years we discovered that certain expenditures have increased disproportionately with the increase in student enrollment.

Table 2 below compares components of the FY 2003 Recommended MCPS Operating Budget with the FY 2011 Recommended MCPS Operating Budget. Student enrollment has only increased 3.25% over this time period, while the Operating Budget has increased by 59%. The number of classroom teachers has only increased by 11.7%, which is minimal when one recognizes that the initiatives for all-day kindergarten and class size reduction were added over the course of these years. The overall number of staff increased by 12.75%. There is an extremely large disparity between the increase in the number of classroom teachers compared with the increase in the number of MCPS Executives, Administrators, and Other Support Personnel from FY 2003 to FY 2011.

Table 2 Comparison of MCPS Operating Budget Components FY 2003 v FY 2011⁵

Selected MCPS Budget Components	FY 2003 Superintendent's Recommended Operating Budget	FY 2011 Superintendent's Recommended Operating Budget	% Increase
Total Student Enrollment #	138,794	143,309	3.25
Number of Teacher Positions	9,473	10,580	11.70
Total Number of MCPS Staff Positions	18,792	21,188	12.75
Total Projected Operating Budget \$	\$1,398,594,671	\$2,226,134,843	59.17
Number of Positions MCPS Executives, Administrators and Other Support Personnel	88	540	513.6
Communications and Family Outreach Budget \$	\$370,109	\$10,954,407	2860.0

⁵ Superintendent's Recommended MCPS Operating Budgets for FY 2003 and FY 2011

MCPS must refocus their efforts on increasing the number of staff who have direct contact with students. More teachers are needed at the local school level, while at the same time reducing personnel that do not have contact with students.

Operating Budget dollars must be reallocated to provide direct support to students. Where is the accountability? Have the benefits exceeded the costs? What evaluations have been completed to determine if there has been a return on this investment? For example, the budget for Communications and Family Outreach has increased over 2800%, to almost \$11 million dollars. It is difficult to comprehend how classes offered through the Parent Academy that take parents on tours of MCPS bus depots and the food service preparation facility, help to improve student achievement or close the achievement gap in MCPS.

During these lean budget times it is fiscally responsible for the County Council to request that MCPS evaluate and re-evaluate the effectiveness of programs, initiatives, and the tax dollars spent on them.

Increasing class size in the Churchill Cluster is not the solution to the budget crisis. Our students will not continue to achieve in the manner in which our County and MCPS officials and others are proud to publicize if the minimal number of staff and expenditure per pupil are reduced any further. Since Churchill is one of the top performing clusters in the county your financial support is crucial to ensure our continued high level of educational quality mentioned by *Forbes* and GreatSchools as well as to the County's future success and economic well being.

Thank you again for providing the Churchill Cluster with an opportunity to testify before you this evening.