
**Walt Whitman High School
Thomas W. Pyle Middle School**

**Bannockburn Elementary School
Bethesda Elementary School (shared)
Bradley Hills Elementary School
Burning Tree Elementary School
Carderock Springs Elementary School
Wood Acres Elementary School**

FY 2011 Operating Budget Testimony

Whitman Cluster

April 8, 2010

Good evening, President Floreen, Vice President Ervin, and Distinguished Members of the County Council. My name is Deborah Goldman and with me tonight are my Whitman Cluster Co-Coordinators, Keith Parsky and Jean Schlesinger.

As you continue your unenviable task of creating a Budget in these extremely difficult financial times, the Whitman Cluster pledges our continued help in securing funds to aid you in your efforts. This past fall, Whitman Cluster parents wrote hundreds of letters to the Governor asking him to support legislation to ensure that MCPS students were not penalized - in any amount - for Montgomery County's non-compliance with the Maintenance of Effort requirements, and for an increase in capital funding for our schools.¹ We also hosted the Majority Leader and our delegation to discuss education and funding issues. And we continue to speak with and lobby our State leaders, most recently to voice our opposition to the BOAST legislation and the contemplated shift of the teacher pensions to the counties.

¹ See Attachments A & B.

In addition to asking the State for funding, we must also, of course, look to you to continue to invest in our children through adequate funding of MCPS. Tonight, the Whitman Cluster asks of you two things in particular. First, we ask that you fund "not a penny less" than Executive Leggett's proposed budget. Second, we ask that you press the Board of Education to spend the money you provide in a way to best serve all the children in this County.

"Not a penny less." We know that you are aware that even the Superintendent's proposed Operating Budget is bare-bones, given the increased enrollment that MCPS has seen over the past two years. Even a flat Operating Budget is, in fact, a reduction in per pupil spending. And in our Quad Cluster we have already felt the reduced spending this year. Despite current staffing guidelines, elementary schools in our Quad Cluster have been asked at the last minute to cobble together combination classes rather than offered an additional teacher, so that discrete grade-level classes taught by full-time classroom teachers have already started to disappear. The result has been an increase in bullying of the younger children in the class, and teasing of the older children in the class. In addition, the learning centers were closed without providing adequate paraeducator or other trained staffing support to the inclusion classes; these classes are, therefore, facing increasingly disruptive behavior. Our general population students appear to have become less tolerant of their special education peers, while meeting the needs of our special education students has become extremely challenging. With additional staffing cuts, we fear these problems will only be exacerbated. We are, therefore, quite concerned about

Mr. Leggett's proposed cuts to the already bare-bones Operating Budget. Given the dire financial straits in which we find ourselves, however, it is with trepidation that we offer our support to Mr. Leggett's proposal. Any further cuts, however, would be simply devastating to our children. We ask, therefore, that you provide "not a penny less" than that proposed by Mr. Leggett.

As we testified last year, the Whitman Cluster firmly believes that the best way to meet the educational goals for all children in our County is by maintaining the reduced class size initiative. We recognize that certain vocal special interest groups have pressed the Board of Education to fund specific programs, which arguably do not serve directly the goals of closing the achievement gap or continuous improvement for all students. In times of financial need, we must focus on the most pressing needs of all children, and we believe passionately that maintaining reduced class size is critical to meeting these goals.

We are well aware that this Council has limited ability to dictate to the Board of Education how to spend allocated money in the Operating Budget. To the extent, however, that this Council shares our view that children throughout the County are best served by maintaining the reduced class size initiative, we hope that you will fund the categories within the Operating Budget that will keep teachers in our classrooms, and that you will press the Board of Education to do the same.

Thank you and good evening.

The Honorable Martin J. O'Malley
Governor, State of Maryland
State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401 - 1925

December 9, 2009

Dear Governor O'Malley:

Last year, despite difficult financial times, you demonstrated your commitment to education and Montgomery County. As the parent of a child attending _____ Elementary School in the Montgomery County Public School ("MCPS") Whitman Cluster, I thank you and ask you to consider two important challenges we now face.

First, we find ourselves in an unenviable position with respect to Montgomery County's non-compliance with the FY 2010 Maintenance of Effort ("MOE") requirements. We look to you for your continued leadership in education, and ask you to ensure that students are held harmless against the consequences of any unusual or unforeseen fiscal circumstances. In this particularly difficult budget year, reduction of state funding on the magnitude now contemplated would plainly serve to penalize the very students MOE is intended to serve. We urge you to support whatever legislation or other action is needed to ensure that MCPS **students** are not penalized – in any amount – for Montgomery County's non-compliance with the MOE requirements.

With respect to capital funding, we urge that you significantly increase MCPS' allocation of State construction funds for FY 2011. We believe such an increase would be a "win-win-win" outcome for the State, as well as for MCPS students. Aging MCPS school buildings are both figuratively and literally bursting at the seams. With population growth continuing to expand at unprecedented levels in Montgomery County, the overcrowding at our schools – both in our cluster and throughout the County -- must be alleviated. Funding the capital budget is particularly critical to our Cluster, where elementary school enrollments, on average, exceed 125%. With construction costs and costs of borrowing at all time lows, this is an unprecedented opportunity to invest in school construction. Each dollar invested now will yield extraordinary returns. Such construction also provides real opportunity to put people to work now in our communities, while simultaneously providing the infrastructure needed to educate our children.

Fortifying our children's education is the most promising way to build our economic future. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of these important issues.

Sincerely,

Printed Name:
Address:

The Honorable Martin J. O'Malley
Governor, State of Maryland
State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401 - 1925

December 22, 2009

Dear Governor O'Malley:

On behalf of the Walt Whitman Cluster's parents and students in the Montgomery County Public Schools ("MCPS"), we write expressing gratitude and thanks. Last year, despite difficult financial times, you demonstrated your commitment to education and Montgomery County. From Wheaton to Bethesda, we sincerely thank you for authorizing sufficient education funding in Maryland's budget last year.

As active and concerned Montgomery County residents, we are deeply concerned by the recent opinion finding that Montgomery County did not comply with the FY 2010 Maintenance of Effort ("MOE") requirements. We look to you for your continued leadership in education, and ask that you ensure that students are held harmless against the consequences of any unusual or unforeseen fiscal circumstances. In this particularly difficult budget year, reduction of state funding on the magnitude now contemplated would plainly serve to penalize the very students MOE is intended to serve. We urge you to support whatever legislation or other action is needed to ensure that MCPS **students** are not penalized – in any amount – in this process.

We respect to capital funding, we urge that you significantly increase MCPS' allocation of State construction funds for FY 2011. We believe such an increase would be a "win-win-win" outcome for the State, as well as for MCPS students. Aging MCPS school buildings are both figuratively and literally bursting at the seams. With population growth continuing to expand at unprecedented levels in Montgomery County, the overcrowding at our schools – both in our cluster and throughout the County -- must be alleviated. Funding the capital budget is particularly critical to our Cluster, where elementary school enrollments, on average, exceed 125%. With construction costs and costs of borrowing at all time lows, this is an unprecedented opportunity to invest in school construction. Each dollar invested now will yield extraordinary returns. Such construction also provides real opportunity to put people to work now in our communities, while simultaneously providing the infrastructure needed to educate our children.

The huge influx of *over 4,000* new students in the past *two years* amplifies the negative impacts of cuts to the budget and makes it extremely difficult to maintain educational excellence for all our students. Montgomery County's growing diversity also requires more resources directed to its schools. As you know, Montgomery County has more than 37,000 students who receive free or reduced meals ("FARM") -- *a number greater than the total enrollment at sixteen other school systems in Maryland*. We also have more than 16,000 students whose first language is not English - *- a number greater than the entire enrollment at ten other Maryland school systems*. Fortifying our children's education is the most promising way to build our economic future. We therefore respectfully request that you continue to fulfill your promise to protect and strengthen our children's education by funding the Bridge to Excellence and the GCEI.

Finally, we hope you will honor the significant improvements made to the teacher pension system. The 2006 improvements provide vital support to employees and enhance the ability to attract and retain highly qualified staff to serve public school students in our County and across the State. Any transfer of funding responsibility from the State to the counties, would necessarily undermine those improvements and, in effect, reverse the Bridge to Excellence commitment to increasing the State share of education funding.

To date, over 400 parents from the Whitman Cluster have sent letters to you, asking for your support on these vital issues. As the Cluster Coordinators for this cluster, we would welcome an opportunity to discuss these funding related concerns with you or a member of your office. We have provided below our respective telephone numbers and email addresses. Thank you for your time and attention to our concerns, and we look forward to the possibility of a dialogue on these important issues.

Sincerely,

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Cluster Coordinators, Whitman Cluster
Montgomery County Council PTA