

**Cold Spring Elementary School – DuFief Elementary School
Fallsmead Elementary School – Lakewood Elementary School
Stone Mill Elementary School – Travilah Elementary School
Cabin John Middle School – Robert Frost Middle School
Thomas S. Wootton High School**

**Testimony to Montgomery County Council
By Junhua Liu, Wootton Cluster Coordinator
April 16, 2020**

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony on the FY 2021 Operating Budget. My name is Junhua Liu and I am one of the Wootton Cluster Coordinators.

I would like to start with expressing our support to MCPS's commitment in "preparing all students to thrive in their future". Every student should be encouraged and nurtured to reach his or her full potential regardless of their race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. As it is stated in the proposed budget, all means all. No student shall be left behind or left aside.

Tonight, I will comment on several areas of concern for the Wootton cluster. We ask that you consider these concerns when you discuss and finalize the operating budget.

MCPS now has approximately 12% of student population identified as students with disabilities. Special education is an integral part of our school system. Wootton cluster hosts several special education programs. We appreciate the over eight million dollars increase in the budget for Special Education Programs and Services and the addition of over 100 new positions including special educators, paraeducators, speech language pathologists, physical therapists and social workers. However, the teamwork for special education goes beyond these professionals directly working with the students in the programs. It also requires support from other staff and school administrators. Staffing allocations primarily based on student enrollment does not meet the administrative need for schools that host special education programs. In particular, DuFief Elementary School is a single administrator school due to its relatively low student enrollment. However, the school has a larger number of staff than some schools that have higher student enrollment because it hosts a Special Education Learning Center. Administrative need for special education programs should be factored in when making staffing allocations. We ask that an assistant principal position be added to DuFief elementary school to meet its administrative need. There are also concerns over the proposed

increase in the duration of Preschool Education Program (PEP) from five hours to six hours. Due to time constraints, Ms. Alicia Rose from Stone Mill Elementary School will testify on this later tonight.

Another important area is implementation of the new elementary and middle school curriculum. Last year, there were schools that experienced a shortage of supplies such as math kits required for the new curriculum. As the new curriculum continues to roll out, we ask that all schools be provided with sufficient supplies for all grade levels, including math kits, reading kits, reading books and chrome books. No child shall be left to read without books or to learn without proper support. We continue to emphasize the importance of professional development for teachers and recruiting qualified substitute teachers. Teachers must have time to learn the curriculum, approaches to teach the curriculum to students of all abilities, and time to collaborate with each other. It is also essential that trainings are provided to prepare teachers in remediation, enrichment and appropriate acceleration to all students.

Though importance of STEM education is well recognized, “science”, which is the first word in the acronym, is often under-resourced and weakly supported. At the elementary school level, students may not have regular experience in science. At the high school level, there is a paucity of science electives – for example, there are very few courses in the Earth sciences (which include geology, atmospheric sciences, ocean & marine science, ecology). This is surprising considering the importance of, and student interest in, topics such as climate change – where a sound grasp of the underlying science is essential for responding to the challenge. Teaching science well requires facilities, including laboratories, consumables and access to observation and experimentation for every student. We would like to call on MCPS to make adequate provisions for such operational expenses, as well as professional development and training for teachers to be able to effectively deliver instruction and inspire and motivate students towards science.

Ultimately, all the education in the world is of no avail, unless students are available and capable of receiving it. Mental and emotional health and wellness is essential for students to not only take advantage of instruction, but also for enabling a school experience conducive for their personal growth. Many schools are well below target levels for counselor: student ratios. Counselors need time and skills to engage with students and support their mental health. Activities to support mental health and wellness, whether meditation or social skills groups, need adequate budgetary support.

With the pandemic, the teachers have to teach at home and the students have to study at home. The e-learning is extremely important for everyone. Based on my observation for my kids, the current e-learning system definitely can't substitute the traditional classroom learning. I encourage the council

support the cost to invest a new e-learning system for the entire school system in MCPS. When everything goes back to normal, it will be even more important for the students and teachers to have the resources to catch up what they have missed during the pandemic, especially for the science and other hands-on subjects.

Thank you for all that you do to continually improve Montgomery County schools. Please consider our testimony and that of other MCCPTA clusters as you make final decisions on the budget. I hope everyone stays safe and healthy!!