

# TESTIMONY TO THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL

## FY2027 MCPS Operating Budget

Submitted by Brenda M. Diaz | Candidate, At-Large Seat, Montgomery County Board of Education (2026)

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My name is Brenda Diaz. I am a bilingual classroom teacher with more than 20 years of experience in public and private schools across D.C. and Maryland. I am a James Madison Fellow, a Georgetown University graduate, and a mother of three daughters who attended MCPS schools. I am running for the At-Large seat on the Montgomery County Board of Education.

I am here today to ask you a simple question on behalf of every parent and taxpayer in this county:

**If you ran a business that spent \$3.78 billion a year — and only 22% of your customers' children could pass Algebra I, and fewer than 55% of third graders could read at grade level — would you give that business a raise?**

Most people would say no. They would say, “Fix the problem first. Show me results! Then we'll talk about more money.”

That is exactly what I am asking this Council to demand of MCPS today.

### **The Numbers Don't Lie — And They Don't Justify a Blank Check**

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According to MCPS's own state test data, only 55.3% of students are proficient in reading and only 33.4% are proficient in math. The numbers are even more dramatic for our African-American, Hispanic, FARMS, and Special Education students. Yet the proposed FY2027 budget asks for a 10.02% increase over the already-approved FY25 budget— even while enrollment is simultaneously declining by more than 2,600 students this school year alone, with thousands more projected to leave in the years ahead.

Let that all sink in. Fewer students + Lower test scores → Higher spending.

The above equation does not compute because what we have on our hands is a leadership and accountability problem. County Council, it's time you took your oversight responsibility seriously.

As I wrote in my CleanSlateMoCo article, '[Attach Performance Metrics to All Future MCPS Budgets](#),' the County Council, the County Executive, MCPS, and MCEA are placing residents in a false dilemma — asking us to choose between our children's future and fiscal prudence. That is not a real choice. States like Louisiana and Mississippi have proven that you can achieve dramatic academic gains through targeted, metrics-driven investment without unlimited

spending increases. The difference is that those states demanded results before they wrote the check.

Mississippi, once ranked last in the nation in reading, is now a national model — not because it spent the most, but because it directed every professional development dollar toward proven, curriculum-specific reading instruction and held schools accountable for outcomes. MCPS should follow that model. Instead, it continues to fund professional development with no demonstrated connection to improved student reading, writing, or math scores.

## **What I Am Asking the Council to Do**

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I urge the Council to take the following five actions. Each one is common sense. Each one is urgently needed.

### **1. End the Consent Agenda for Significant Expenditures**

The current Board of Education has cut annual business meetings from 24 to 12 and routinely moves millions of dollars through consent agendas without meaningful public discussion or contract review. A school system that spends \$3.78 billion of taxpayer money should not be rubber-stamping contracts. Every significant expenditure must be examined in open session, with full public transparency. End the blank checks now.

### **2. Attach Performance Metrics to Every Future Budget**

This is the heart of my testimony and the heart of my platform. Before this Council approves any budget increase above maintenance of effort, MCPS must demonstrate measurable academic progress — in reading, in math, and in outcomes for our most vulnerable students. A leap of faith, as Councilmember Marilyn Balcombe herself acknowledged in 2024, is not a responsible way to spend \$3.78 billion. If MCPS cannot show the Council that last year's spending produced gains for students, it has not earned this year's increase. Plain and simple.

### **3. Establish an Independent Office of the Inspector General (OIG) for MCPS**

Montgomery County government already has an independent OIG. MCPS — which spends nearly four billion taxpayer dollars — needs the same. An independent OIG would investigate waste, fraud, and abuse without interference from the Board or the central office. Superintendent Taylor has mentioned creating this office, yet there has been no formal action to make it a reality. It's time that the County Council take the reins. Right now, there is no independent watchdog ensuring dollars reach classrooms rather than bureaucracy. Parents and teachers have lost faith. An OIG rebuilds that trust.

### **4. Require Comprehensive, Independent Audits**

Not just financial audits — operational audits that examine staffing ratios, procurement practices, curriculum effectiveness, and administrative overhead. MCPS non-instructional overhead now represents approximately 45% of the budget, compared to Fairfax County's

35–37%. That gap is roughly \$250 million that is not reaching classrooms. We need to know exactly where the money is going before we are asked to provide more of it.

## **5. Fund Maintenance of Effort Only — And Redirect Savings to Classrooms**

Maintenance of effort — the legal minimum required by state law — is the right and responsible funding level for a system that has not demonstrated results. The savings from living within MOE, combined with the cost-cutting measures outlined below, will allow MCPS to redirect dollars to the places that actually matter.

### **Practical Cost-Cutting That Protects Students**

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These are not abstract ideas. They are common-sense savings that any responsible manager would pursue:

- Return to physical textbooks, workbooks, paper, and pencils. The evidence that Chromebook-driven instruction improves academic outcomes is weak. The cost of purchasing, maintaining, and replacing these devices is enormous. Ending this program generates immediate savings that can go directly to teacher support and classroom materials.
- Cut central office staffing further. The modest \$11.5 million in proposed central-office reductions is a start — but it is not enough given that administrative overhead has grown dramatically while enrollment has fallen. Audits will identify the specific redundancies that must go.
- Renegotiate MCEA union contracts to reflect fiscal reality. Current contracts lock in automatic raises and step increases regardless of enrollment declines or academic results. The law already allows renegotiation if the Council reduces the requested budget. Future contracts must tie compensation increases to performance metrics and fiscal sustainability.
- Redirect savings to critical facility repairs. Buildings like Magruder High School are crumbling. Mold, infrastructure failures, and deferred maintenance are unacceptable. With the efficiencies gained above, we can fix these buildings without asking taxpayers for a single additional dollar beyond MOE.

### **The Louisiana and Mississippi Model — Proof That This Works**

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I want to be clear: I am not asking MCPS to do less for students. I am asking it to do better — and to prove it!

Louisiana did not throw money at its reading crisis. It directed every professional development dollar toward vetted, curriculum-specific training. It built a system of accountability over two decades. The results were dramatic. Mississippi did the same. Both states now outperform states that spend far more per pupil.

Montgomery County has every advantage those states lacked — a wealthy tax base, a highly educated community, experienced teachers, and world-class facilities. What it lacks is in serious

measure is accountability. What it lacks is the absolute requirement to demonstrate results before receiving more resources. That is what I am asking this Council to impose today.

## **Conclusion**

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The status quo has failed our children. Parents are dismissed. Teachers are demoralized. Academic results continue to show marginal gains, at best, despite massive spending. Every year, we are asked to have faith. Every year, that faith goes unrewarded. We are over it!

The parents and taxpayers of Montgomery County deserve better. Our students deserve better. The teachers who show up every day and do their best deserve better.

I urge this Council to act decisively: end the consent agenda for significant expenditures, attach performance metrics to every future MCPS budget, establish an independent OIG, require comprehensive audits, adopt the governance recommendations of School Boards of Excellence, and commit to maintenance of effort funding only — paired with the targeted cost-cutting measures I have outlined.

Our children's futures depend on the courage to demand results. I am asking you to have that courage today.

Thank you.

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Respectfully submitted,

**Brenda M. Diaz, M.Ed.**

Candidate, At-Large Member, Montgomery County Board of Education (2026)

