

"Federation Corner" column
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MCPS proposed Operating Budget

by Paula Bienenfeld, Chair, MCCF Education Committee

The Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Operating Budget for the fiscal year starting July 1 of this year has been released and is available online at the following web address:
www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/budget/FY2011/superintendent/ . Hard copies of the FY2011 Operating Budget should also be available at county libraries.

I urge everyone to read through this budget carefully. This is quite a slog, but you should remember that this budget comprises half of the total annual budget for the County. As library hours and staff are cut, as meals to seniors and after-school programs for our most vulnerable youth are being cut, and as bus routes are considered for cuts, please remember that all of this money is going to MCPS instead. MCPS is unique, too, in that there is no oversight or accountability for this budget because MCPS is not a state agency, and at the same time it is not a County agency.

The basic budget is this: the current year FY2010 MCPS Operating Budget is \$2,200,927,000 for 140,500 students. The proposed FY2011 budget anticipates 143,309 students, an increase of 2,809 students. And the proposed FY2011 budget is \$2,226,134,843--an increase of \$25,207,843. While most other programs and services are taking significant hits, MCPS has irresponsibly decided not to cut administration, travel, public relations or perks, and is asking for a \$25 million budget increase.

As the budget season has arrived the cries from MCPS have grown louder, and cuts to core programs have been threatened including closing Monocacy Elementary School (which is apparently no longer being considered) and cutting buses for magnet students. Rather than cut core programs, teachers and classroom support, I would urge taxpayers to tell the County Council that the Board of Education (BOE) should be scrutinizing the extras at the administrative level as a place to pare down the budget. For example, the budget for the Office of Communications is proposed to increase by over three percent. This is the office that mails out costly, glossy magazines each year to County households extolling the wonders of the MCPS schools. If our priority is really the classroom, then why would the BOE propose increasing class size before cutting this overhead? This \$10 million office should be decreased substantially.

A second place the BOE could look to shave the budget is Total Administration, Central and Mid-Level, which is about 8.5% of the budget. This is the same percentage it was 15 years ago. Cuts should be made to the administration and central offices rather than to the classrooms and teachers. If the MCPS Administration budget for the next fiscal year was held to the same level as this year, a \$6 million savings would be realized; and, a three percent cut would yield another \$5 million in savings.

Disparities in salaries are also seen in the proposed FY2011 MCPS budget. For example, the Department of Enriched and Innovative Programs at Carver--MCPS' headquarters facility--has five FTEs, or full-time employees, and a proposed budget of \$555,645. Salaries account for \$543,939 of that amount, which calculates to an average salary of \$108,787 per FTE. The Department of Curriculum and Instruction has 51 FTEs and a total proposed budget of \$6,890,205. With salaries comprising \$5,356,020 of that amount, the average salary in this administrative Department is \$104,814. By comparison, the Pre-Kindergarten and Head Start Programs Office has a proposed budget of \$12,497,975, with a salary line item of \$10,805,756 for 179 FTEs. Most of the full-time employees in this Office are teachers, and their average salary is just \$60,338.

Each year at budget season, MCPS attempts to whip up the troops by threatening our most important resources--classrooms and teachers. This year, please do not succumb to the MCPS message that the MCPS

budget, so much of which goes to Carver Administrative Headquarters, must be increased. Please send an email to the Board of Education at boe@mcpsmd.org, to County Executive Isiah Leggett at ocemail@montgomerycountymd.gov, and to the County Council at county.council@montgomerycountymd.gov, and tell them that the MCPS budget should not be increased, that there must be significant County Council oversight of the spending of billions of our tax dollars by MCPS, and that prudent cuts should be made to administrative offices and not to classrooms and teachers.

As the Education Committee Chair for the Montgomery County Civic Federation, I plan to write a letter stating such to our County officials. Our most valuable future citizens, our children, deserve better.

The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800-1000 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to theelms518@earthlink.net