

**FY22 Operating Budgets and FY21-26 CIP Testimony to
Montgomery County Council
By MCCPTA Wootton Cluster Coordinators
April 7, 2021**

Good evening, my name is Yin Zheng. I am one of the three Wootton Cluster Coordinators. I am here today to testify on behalf of Wootton cluster. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration as our community joins together to highlight the needs of our students, parents, faculty and staff. In these unprecedented times our community continues to support a strong countywide public education system. It is our hope that the council will fully fund the proposed budget to ensure all of our County school facilities will be prepared to reopen safely, properly staffed, and with the appropriate safety and transportation plans in place.

While our community looks forward to returning our students to a safe classroom, we are very concerned with the current reduction in staffing, mental health support, and PPE and HVAC updates. Safety is a major concern for many families and faculty. Funds need to be allocated to ensure that staffing is in place to support returning students (including teachers, paraeducators, environmental, food service, and administrative support), which will assist in providing a safe and comfortable learning space.

Due to the virtual learning environment, enrollment was reduced and in turn staffing was reduced. It is imperative that the funding is available to provide continuous support to faculty as they create new ways to ensure technology is family-friendly and focused for all learners. Many students are in need of alternate learning materials outside of the day-to-day computer regimen. Additional resources are needed to supply textbooks and other printed materials.

As we look forward to the future, we all anticipate the challenges of returning to our school buildings. Together we can ensure funding is allocated in advance to support safety and reduce the chances of widespread COVID-19 infection. Wootton High School is preparing for environmental safety upgrades, which include clean water, air, and learning and eating surfaces. Appropriation of funds for environmental safety is vital to ensure the purchase of healthy and effective cleaning products. HVAC systems will need to be updated and maintained to meet current standards for air quality and safety.

With all eyes focusing on reopening schools, let's not forget the capital improvement projects that were delayed for Wootton High School and Dufief Elementary school prior to the pandemic. Wootton High School is more than 50 years old with leaky ceilings, derelict bathrooms, and poorly functioning HVAC systems, Wootton is far overdue for repairs. Wootton also needs funds to address the hidden safety hazard of its busy front driveway, which poses a major threat to students trying to cross it during rush hours. We would also like to call your attention to the school that was not on the CIP recommendation list. Cold Spring Elementary School doesn't have any safe hallways or rooms for students and staff to congregate in during severe weather or other emergencies such as an active shooter crisis. Their safety is important and we should not forget about them.

We thank you for your continued engagement and support of our public school system. Please help us to address these pressing issues and ensure our children return to safe schools with appropriate staff and resources. Again, thank you for your time and consideration.