

## Public Hearing on Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) Operating Budgets – April 7, 2025

### MCCPTA Central Area Clusters Testimony

WINSTON CHURCHILL CLUSTER • RICHARD MONTGOMERY CLUSTER \* POOLESVILLE CLUSTER

ROCKVILLE CLUSTER \* THOMAS S. WOOTTON CLUSTER

Presented by Amy Ackerberg-Hastings (Central Area Vice-President and RM HS parent)

Good afternoon, President Stewart, members of the County Council, and staff. Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the county's operating budget allocations. My name is Amy Ackerberg-Hastings. I serve MCCPTA as the Central Area Vice-President for the Churchill, Richard Montgomery (RM), Poolesville, Rockville, and Wootton clusters, and I am the parent of an RM junior. Our communities request **full funding of County Executive Elrich's recommendation for MCPS's FY26 operating budget.**

We realize that the present moment is an incredibly challenging one for budget-setting, with probable county revenue shortfalls due to increased unemployment and its cascading effects, state-level deficits in the Maryland Blueprint and other budget categories, and an impulsive and capricious White House administration that shows no interest in safeguarding the most vulnerable members of our communities. Additionally, BOE and County Executive Elrich have added some millions to Superintendent Taylor's original request, which was already very large. However, human and material resources only grow more expensive, while the social-emotional and academic needs of students and staff remain at historic highs. As PTAs, we advocate for **every child** to receive the highest-quality education and to mature holistically through positive and meaningful experiences with classmates, teachers, and staff. I wish I could offer a magic solution for threading the county's income-expense needle, but I can only say that we will stand alongside you in the effort to ensure that **not a single one of our 160,000 students falls through the cracks.**

Indeed, although I have argued that many of the recurring expenditures, such as salaries, should have been presented at a finer granularity<sup>1</sup>, there appears to be nothing frivolous in this budget. Rather, just as the Maintenance of Effort portion of the budget retains essential supports such as social workers and Bridge to Wellness programs, the **new funding requests address longstanding serious needs.** In particular, I think every school in our five clusters could tell hair-raising stories of behavior disruptions that detract from the education of children with severe mental health needs as well as the education of their classmates. Thus, we fully support MCPS's proposed staffing increases such as \$46.7 million to hire 188 special education teachers and add 500 full-time paraeducators through new hires and through converting existing temporary part-time positions to FTE. Similarly, the plan to spend \$3.2 million on 52.0 FTE additional school-based security assistants will help make all students and staff safer.

While our clusters also support other proposed staffing and curriculum funding increases, such as the addition of \$4.3 million to fund 47.0 FTE teachers to support Emergent Multilingual Learners (EML), to be frank the overriding concern among parents in the Central Area is **class**

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<sup>1</sup> BOE Operating Budget Hearing, 16 January 2025, <https://www.boarddocs.com/mabe/mcpsmd/Board.nsf/PRINT-AgendaDetailed?open&id=DCRR886CB33D>.

sizes.<sup>2</sup> We see the added positions in the FY26 operating budget as a **first step** toward bringing more adults into classrooms and thus reducing student-teacher ratios. We are also encouraged that Dr. Taylor has expressed interest in reforming the policy definitions for class size guidelines and instituting firm caps on the number of children assigned to a single teacher.

I know that determining a \$7 billion budget is an enormous job in itself, but I will close by making an additional request: please continue to partner with us in **holding MCPS accountable** for prudent and transparent use of its funds. I am heartened by how much has changed since I appeared here a year ago, such as the culture of plain speaking that appears to be taking root. There is still, though, room for improvement. For example, I am maintaining a healthy skepticism about whether MCPS's proposed Cross-Functional School Leadership Teams will indeed provide more targeted and effective school support or will become part of yet another annual central office reorganization. Further, as we heard during the operating budget forum hosted by Councilmember Jawando on April 1, itinerant special education staff from central office remain unclear about whether their positions have been cut or reallocated. Employees are *human* resources who need to know that they are part of the whole team. Thank you for your attention.

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<sup>2</sup> A description of the FY25 increase can be found here: <https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/news/mcps-news/2024/06/class-size/>. This tool from the Office of Shared Accountability was a useful resource that was apparently abandoned as soon as it was launched in 2018–2019: <https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/sharedaccountability/enrollment/>.