

FY 2013 Operating Budget Testimony
Poolesville Cluster

Donna Lowell
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April 11, 2012

Good evening. My name is Donna Lowell and tonight I am here to share the Poolesville Cluster's comments and priorities for the FY 2013 Operating Budget.

"If you can't be a pine on the top of the hill, be a shrub in the valley but be the best little shrub on the side of the rill. Be a bush if you can't be a tree. If you can't be a highway, just be a trail. If you can't be the sun be a star. It isn't by size that you win or you fail. Be the best at whatever you are. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke those words to students in 1964.

Poolesville cluster schools are the star, the shrub, the trail and we continue to do the best we can even though we are smaller. Thus across the board cuts have profoundly impacted our cluster. We have the same desire as other parents across the county for our children to be given every opportunity to succeed.

The Agriculture Reserve is a star of the county and Montgomery County does not need to continue to grow. It can be the star also and still be a success.

The Poolesville Cluster asks for one thing, just one, equity. Please fund the BOE Operating Budget for 2013. Otherwise the divide between smaller schools and larger schools will continue to widen.

Our schools in the Agriculture Reserve are smaller so when our elementary school classes reach 25 in K-2 we don't get another teacher and we don't when the class size reaches 27. Student to teacher ratios can be even larger at smaller schools. Are our

classrooms larger? No they are smaller than recommended per the recent FACT report. I would ask or maybe dare for each of you to come out to a classroom or back out for those that taught and teach for one day. Stand in the shoes of a teacher who has 27 first graders in a classroom meant to hold far less. You have multiple reading groups, multiple math groups, students who are struggling to stay on grade level, some have learning disabilities and some have emotional issues that all take extra time just like in larger schools. Tell me how in a day's time that a teacher spend enough time with each student and each group. We are amazed that our wonderful teachers come back to school every day and work extra hours to figure out what works for a student that is struggling.

When you cut money from education the across the board cuts profoundly impact smaller schools. Remove one paraeducator, staff development, school counselor, reading specialist, or an on-site technology specialist and those functions are virtually eliminated. We do not have enough staff to meet the growing demands of our students. If the computers break down in our middle school computer lab there is no one there to immediately fix them. Our early learning books are falling apart and the chance of getting some are remote since the budget for textbooks have been slashed again.

The elementary school buildings are 50 years old. We won't get new ones for at least 30 years. The high school building will be well over 70 years if it's rebuilt in 2021, which is not hopeful. State of the art they are not and will not be unless they are modernized. The newest of the new technology comes to new schools while old school languish.

PHS was named the number one high school in the state of Maryland, a set of students won the DC3 Digital Forensics Challenge – first place in the U.S and the World (11,200 students participated), and we fielded semifinalists in the Siemens Science Competition. Think of what the students could do with a first class facility and with adequate staffing.

The classroom teachers and staff at these schools are working with less and still being asked to have the students perform at the same levels as previous years. There will be a point where this level of achievement will not be able to be maintained. This is not the fault of the classroom teachers, the school staff, the parents or the students.

Continued new development drives the need for new schools to be built that takes away the money from our older schools and continuously pushes modernizations farther out. PHS and our elementary schools and the older schools across the county will be condemned before they are modernized. We have to slow down growth, force developers to pay for the infrastructure and adequate affordable housing. Don't punish the existing schools for over development, lower revenue and the inability to say no.

We want our children to have the tools necessary by the time they leave high school to do as Emerson stated "Do not go where the path may lead go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." They need the skills, confidence and education to have the ability to carve out their own paths.

We thank all of you for the time and effort to ensure the quality of education of Montgomery County students remains high.

Attachment 1

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Poolesville Cluster FY 2013 Operating Budget Requests

1. Poolesville High School
 - a. Continue funding Project Lead the Way
 - b. Continue funding the Whole School Magnet Program
 - c. Full time Science Aide
2. John Poole Middle School
 - a. Two full time counselors (1.5 current allocation)
 - b. On-site technology specialist (shared service provider)
 - c. Full time Music Teacher (.8 current allocation)
 - d. Additional Staff Development Teacher positions
 - e. Netbooks for all students
3. Moncacy Elementary School
 - a. Full time Reading Specialist
 - b. Full time Staff Development Teacher
 - c. Open out of cluster student transfer policy
4. Poolesville Elementary School
 - a. Full time Staff Development Teacher
 - b. Full time Reading Specialist
 - c. Paraeducators
 - d. Promethean Boards – one per classroom