

**STATEMENT BEFORE BOARD OF EDUCATION  
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND  
Hearings for FY 2006 Operating Budget  
January 13, 2005  
Written Statement for the Record  
(Accompanied by Short Summary for Oral Presentation)**

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**Subject: FY 2006 Operating Budget**

My name is Ambassador Sandy Vogelgesang. I represent the West Bradley Citizens' Association. As the mother of two children in Montgomery County schools, I belong to the Seven Locks Elementary and Winston Churchill High School PTAs. This statement highlights two issues:

- 1. Priorities for the Operating Budget**
- 2. Importance of fiscal responsibility for overall school spending**

**First, regarding priorities for the Operating Budget**, we commend the Superintendent for his commitment to higher educational performance, including some points identified in the proposed \$26 million for "initiatives to improve student achievement." We also commend the priorities identified by the MCCPTA budget compact – especially those addressing "educational program staffing," "educational resources," and "a safe and healthful environment."

**On staffing**, although County schools generally do well by those students who are most or least gifted, the vast majority in the middle often get short shrift. One of the main reasons is the lack of teachers. The Board should thus expand the number of teachers you plan to hire to reduce class size. The County needs more than the 175 additional teachers proposed in the Superintendent's "Budget Initiatives." In particular, the Board should include far more than the 40 positions proposed for reducing oversize secondary school classes County-wide. Why must my children get lost in the shuffle of large classes, with teachers too busy to help them, to alert me to their problems, and, sometimes, even to know their names?

**On resources**, the proposed budget indicates that many MCPS textbooks do not reflect the County curriculum and therefore includes plans to purchase and distribute about \$3.7 million in new textbooks. However, the budget also indicates that "these textbooks will be purchased without adding to the budget by realigning funds from other

textbook and materials accounts....” The Board should, instead, allocate increased funding for textbooks. Why must my children, who will start semester exams tomorrow, struggle with no textbooks in one third of their classes? Why must my son, in introductory Latin, depend on my old textbook?

**On health and safety**, the MCCPTA compact rightly identifies many issues from air quality in trailers, to lead in drinking water and discipline problems. One of our main concerns is drug abuse in our schools. Yet, the proposed budget item for “Safe and Drug Free Schools” requests no net change from the current FY 2005 budget of \$396,748 and indicates no initiative to bolster supervisory or security capacity to crack down on open drug trafficking? Why do students at our high school report that drugs can be bought anytime, even inside the school?

**Second, to deal with such priority issues, the School Board must exercise maximal fiscal responsibility -- not just in the Operating Budget, but for overall school spending.** As taxpayers, who are shocked by the latest huge increase in tax assessments, we see funds for operating and capital budgets ultimately as part of one pot of money – ours! Further, there is some overlap between operating and capital budgets. Reportedly, some operating needs are in the capital budget, and vice versa, partly to ensure adequate funding if one budget is cut. We thus pose the following **questions**:

- Why does Montgomery County pay a premium for State funding to cover educational expenses?
- Why persist in forward funding when there is a shortfall in State funding?
- Why surplus school property that is needed for this County’s growing student population or lose revenue that might be earned through leasing or rental of facilities?
- Why not concentrate on priority operational issues, such as hiring more teachers, rather than wasting money on projects that communities and PTAs do not want? For example, why build a large replacement school for Seven Locks Elementary on Kendale Road that may cost twice as much (estimated \$15+ million versus \$7.5 million) as just adding on to the existing school?

**In sum, our community asks that the School Board review the proposed Operating Budget in the context of overall school spending and that you exercise greater fiscal responsibility in order to address highest educational priorities. Resist proposals that may provide more benefit for some developers and politicians rather than our children. You will have our enthusiastic support if, instead, you concentrate on our shared objective, educating our children.**

(Seven Locks – Final Statement - Jan. 2005 Hearing)

