

BUDGET BRIEF

Montgomery County Public Schools Lowering Class Sizes to Close the Achievement Gap

The Montgomery County Board of Education has recommended a \$2.3 billion Operating Budget for next school year (2014–2015). The budget is a 4 percent increase over this year’s budget and is just 2.5 percent above the minimum funding level required by state law. This budget will allow MCPS to continue to provide all students with access to a world-class education while managing its enrollment growth. The budget also invests strategically in key areas that will allow MCPS to narrow the achievement gap and prepare students to thrive in their future.

One area of strategic investment is a multiyear effort to provide extra teachers to work with students who are struggling in reading and mathematics.

THE NEED

Overall, students in Montgomery County Public Schools perform at a very high level and the district has done a good job of narrowing achievement gaps in key areas, such as graduation rates, Advanced Placement performance, and early grades reading. But, in other areas, these gaps remain and some have even grown.

For instance, the percentage of MCPS students who successfully complete Algebra 2 by the end of Grade 11 has continued to rise over the past several years. However, the percentage of White and Asian students reaching this milestone is nearly twice the rate for African American and Hispanic students. And that gap has not narrowed significantly.

THE PLAN

The Board’s budget includes about \$1 million to add 15 high school focus teachers in English language arts and mathematics. These teachers will lower class sizes in high schools where the data demonstrate the need and will allow for more individualized instruction for students who are struggling.

This investment builds on positions that were added in past budgets, including 17 positions in Downcounty Consortium high schools and 6 positions added in FY 2014 to support instruction in Watkins Mill, Springbrook and Gaithersburg high schools. Also in FY 2014, the Board of Education added 30 focus teachers to lower English and mathematics class sizes in MCPS middle schools.

The Board’s budget request also continues the long-standing effort to provide extra resources to the highest-needs schools. For instance, for more than a decade, MCPS has provided, on average, \$1.9 million in additional money per school to the district’s 67 elementary schools most impacted by poverty. These funds are used, in great part, to lower class sizes.

GET INFORMED, STAY ENGAGED

You can learn more about the Board’s budget proposal on the MCPS website at www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org, search “Operating Budget.” The budget is now in the hands of the Montgomery County Executive and the Montgomery County Council. Share your thoughts with them:

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- » **Montgomery County Council:** county.council@montgomerycountymd.gov, 240-777-7900