

Notes from the Superintendent's FY 2026 Operating Budget Engagement Session

(Clarksburg HS, Nov. 21, 2024, 6:30 pm, 32 attendees)

The superintendent made opening remarks and general comments about the development of the operating budget.

1. **The speaker** asks how there can be an increase in funding, but yet there are cuts projected; why?

Response: The superintendent discusses the cost of running a school system, and the first part of the answer is inflation. The cost of things and doing things rises each year. A national teacher shortage and a national everything shortage means recruiting and paying great staff costs more. The county revenue is projected at 2.5%, but so is the projection for inflation at 2.5%
2. **The speaker** asks if there is a department of community partnerships, especially in business and other partnerships, that can bring in money to offset costs.

Response: The superintendent says yes, but that has been cut in recent years. However, it is an area that we need to consider because we need to consider all forms of resources, no matter where they come from.
3. **The speaker** asked about the loss of federal funding if the US Department of Education is cut, as President Trump has promised he intends to do. What is your plan B to deal with this potentially?

Response: The superintendent discusses the exact impacts if the US DOE is cut. It could mean a loss of Title I and IDEA grant money and so much more. The good news is that it would take a lot of work for the administration to make those changes quickly. Much of what the department has to do is based in law. What would be most disruptive changes in those financial streams would be that they are not well-financed, and we would find it difficult to continue those services.
4. **The speaker** asks about funding for restorative justice coaches. Is this especially important since we are seeing all kinds of behaviors in schools that need those resources?

Response: The superintendent defines Restorative Justice and then says it is a highly effective strategy. What is essential is that the toolkit includes many tools to support students and other challenges in schools. The program costs about 1 million dollars. Our resources must shift from solving problems to teaching others to expand those strategies in more district areas.
5. **The speaker** also discusses restorative justice. She relates a story about a few students disrupting class and asks what can be done. Her school says there needs to be more restorative justice resources here. How can this be true? Why do I have to come here and talk about safety and security?

Response: First, the superintendent discusses that he is sorry that she and her child are having that experience. Safety as our priority should not be aspirational but fact and it is unfortunate that this is not our truth in some places. So, we need to look at a lot of

different things. For example, what is the proper placement for our students? This may take a few weeks but should not take a few months. This should not necessarily require an investment of dollars but should require an investment in different thinking and responses.

6. **The speaker** also discusses safety issues, which she believes result from large class sizes and the fact that many of those students may have special needs, combined with the issue of not having enough paraeducators. Large class sizes, lack of support, and many of the adults are young. How do we ensure there is the right kind of support in schools to deal with these concerns? She asks the superintendent to go bold on the ask in his budget.

Response: The superintendent reminds the crows that her school is one of the largest elementary in the county. First, I agree that having enough staff and proper staffing is important. Even though there are staffing challenges in our secondary schools, our elementary schools are understaffed. Managing our younger students requires great vigilance, which is why extra hands are important.

7. **The speaker** is also concerned about the level of support for elementary school students and about class disruptions. She shifts to something that the county executive stated about how schools organize staffing. She is worried about the quality of schools and tells how many of her neighbors are moving to Frederick or Howard counties. How closely are you working with him, and what does the county government understand about the real need for MCPS?

Response: The superintendent talks about the per pupil cost and what that \$19,000 on average gets you for your money. For a general education student, that is a good level of support, but more is required for students needing greater support. The fundamental drivers of the budget are how many people we employ and what we pay them. We must answer whether we are getting the right return on our investments and making appropriate choices. We need to preserve the things closest to our classroom; some of those things have been cut in recent years. We also must invest to maintain our resources, our buildings, etc.

8. **The speaker** discusses special education and is concerned about the needs of special needs students who need help to be served by regular education teachers. What are the top three priorities, and where does special education rank in there? When will we start to see any changes in the special education space?

Response: My priorities reflect conversations like this, and far and away, special education is number one, and number two are students learning English, and maybe that is a tie with literacy. Finally, the third would be safety. Special education needs to be broken to fix it to what it needs to be. Two areas need to be addressed. The experience in the classroom and then behind the scenes is the bureaucracy behind the scenes.

9. **The speaker** asks about recruitment of paraprofessionals: What are we going to do to make this a place where they can work?

Response: We need to differentiate pay for our paraprofessionals, as they do different work from one class to another. Their jobs can be bigger in some areas and less so in others.

10. **The speaker** asks if the county's profits from selling alcohol can be moved to special education. What can MCPS do about this?

Response: In terms of prevention, I do need to learn more about what the county or MCPS is doing. It is certainly part of our health curriculum. As for the profits from the county's alcohol sales, Ivon says she believes they do come to fund special education. Our special education budget is approximately 600 million, with only 55 million of that from the state. It is not enough, and more is needed.

11. **The speaker** is a student who says she did not receive that same message in her health class. She then pivots to student disruptions in the classrooms, specifically the disruptions from special education students. Wouldn't this be an increasing problem if we lose federal money?

Response: Timing is a bit on our side, so we can work to make plans if those monies go away. However, the legal expectation will not go away, so we must continue those services, including for moral reasons. The most significant portion of special education funding comes from our local dollars, not the federal government.

12. **The speaker** expresses concern about class sizes at all levels. Her son's math class has 32 kids, and her principal has said that class size limitations aren't really a thing anymore. Please make it a priority.

Response: A great strategy to manage many of our issues is to reduce class sizes. He thinks this is a fight worth picking and a great point of advocacy for our community, especially our parents.

13. **The speaker** is concerned about bullying, especially of children of color and students who identify as LGBTQ. So what is being done to deal with this problem?

Response: We must take a systemwide approach to addressing bullying. The superintendent discusses the [OLWEUS bully prevention program](#). We must address this so our kids feel safe and ready to learn in the classroom. Safety and security are not one-dimensional; they are also social-emotional safety. When our kids complain, it tells you that they are comfortable enough to tell you rather than lashing out or using disruptive behavior.

14. **The speaker** is a special education teacher and an art teacher. She is concerned about the training and competency of art teachers to work with special education students. Adaptive physical education is an example, and she feels fine arts needs the same support for special education students.

Response: The superintendent says thank you for your suggestion.

15. **The speaker** is a parent of an elementary school student who is asking about safety.

The county is large and has diverse needs, and she has lost her bus service for the before- and after-school programs at her elementary school. How do we think about the ecosystem of the community and schools serving those needs? How can parents advocate?

Response: For advocacy, first, thank you for coming and sharing your concerns, questions, and advocacy at events like today. So keep those lines of communication open; it is very helpful. There have been some concrete patterns of issues that need to be addressed. When you do advocate, don't advocate for all things. Find the one thing

that is most important to you, and maybe that is what our funding partners hear.
Bottomline: the student experience is the one thing that matters.

16. **The speaker** is a maintenance employee who is concerned about the lack of full-time staff members. There are not enough electricians. Is there anything to expand staffing?

Response: This is a big deal. We should save about 2% of our resources to support our space growth (maintenance). Yeah, we need to do that. We also should have teams that address preventative maintenance rather than a small staff that only addresses issues when they break.

17. **The speaker** is concerned about funding for paraeducators. Her special needs child has a good one, but not all day. They don't have the right benefits.

Response: This is a big weakness. We need to change our policy of assigning a para educator who is not full-time to some of our most impacted students. We also need to differentiate the pay, as we discussed earlier.