

Watkins Mill Cluster

Watkins Mill High School.
Montgomery Village Middle School; Neelsville Middle School
South Lake Elementary School; Stedwick Elementary School; Watkins Mill Elementary School;
Whetstone Elementary School

Board of Education Community Forum
Watkins Mill High School

September 18, 2008

Testimony presented by:
Susan Young
Watkins Mill Cluster Co-Coordinator
9800 Hallowell Place
Montgomery Village MD 20886

Good evening President Navarro, Dr. Weast and members of the Board of Education. My name is Susan Young and I am one of the PTA coordinators for the Watkins Mill Cluster, along with Martha Crews and Lon Hamann. I am also the PTSA President at Montgomery Village Middle School.

The MCPS Strategic Plan boasts the following as one example of closing the gap in student achievement: "16 percent of African American and 33 percent of Hispanic seniors scored a 3 or higher on at least one AP exam, exceeding the national average of 15 percent for all students." This is indeed good news. But if you think that's impressive, you'll want to stand up and cheer when you hear what I'm about to tell you:

Here at Watkins Mill High School, we have a relatively young International Baccalaureate (IB) program. It is a tremendous program, and one of which we are very proud. It offers an exceptional opportunity for a world-class education to our students. To ANY student who elects to take on the rigors of this demanding program. So, who are the students who take on this daunting challenge, this exceptional rigor?

So far, the program has had 87 candidates for the IB diploma, in all. 20 percent of those students are African American; 26 percent are Hispanic; 25 percent are white, and 29 percent are Asian. As you can see, our IB program is just as diverse as our school, more closely parallel to the school's racial demographics than any other IB program in this county.

And these students are not just participating; *they are performing*. Over the first 3 years of the program, 70 percent of Watkins Mill's IB Diploma candidates earned that world-class distinction, with very little difference between racial groups. Among students who *did not* earn the full diploma, 79 percent earned scores on IB exams that would make them eligible for college credit. I refer you to the attached table for detailed data.

And, unlike *every other* existing IB program in the county during those years, our students achieved these heights without the benefit of an IB Middle Years Program in our cluster to prepare them for the rigors of IB coursework. Just imagine what our students could accomplish if they had the same advantage as other IB clusters !

When speaking of the need for continued funding for those other MCPS Middle Years Programs, the Superintendent's 2009-2014 Operating Budget noted that they "increase students' capacity for advanced level instruction and prepare them to take advantage of IB Diploma program options as well as Honors and Advanced Placement coursework." We could not agree more, and so we ask you, again, to bring the MYP to our cluster.

We've been told that this is not possible, given the dire budget circumstances this year. And we get that, really we do. Frankly, if I were just advocating for my own 3 kids, I would just cave in, knowing that they will be OK, even when funds are tight. But I'm not. And the kids we represent only get one shot at this school system. So can we have a commitment from you, from MCPS, from someone that when the money starts flowing again, we'll be first in line for a Middle Years Program?

In fact, we'd like to start laying the groundwork now, so that when the money is there, we'll be ready to apply for accreditation from the International Baccalaureate Organization. I know you'll want to make that commitment, because surely we can all agree that the Middle Years Program should not be limited to 5 schools in the lower half of the county.

Now, here's another interesting fact about the tremendously-successful IB program at Watkins Mill HS, one we are not so happy about. Our numbers have steadily *decreased* over the program's 3 years: from 34 diploma candidates in 2006 to 23 in 2008. From 47 certificate students in 2006 to 35 in 2008. How can that be? Where are all of these bright, capable, motivated students going? They're obviously not leaving because the program is failing, right?

I can tell you where a few of them went. Every morning at about 6am, when I have just stumbled out of bed, my next-door-neighbor's Honda Element pulls out with their 2 bright, talented, and very sleepy daughters aboard. They are headed up to Whetstone ES, where one daughter will board a bus to the Richard Montgomery magnet IB program, and the other will begin her nearly hour long commute to Poolesville HS. In fact, as of November, 2007, *thirty-one* students from the Watkins Mill cluster were attending magnet high schools.

And that certainly doesn't count the kids who attend the upcounty magnet middle school. But surely with our wonderful IB Program, we can lure some of *those* students back to this campus for high school, right? Probably not. Because just this year, a brand new IB program was approved, not 4 miles from where we are sitting. And, to our utter dismay, we learned that *every student* who attends the Upcounty Center Program for

the Highly Gifted at Roberto Clemente Middle School will be able to articulate straight into Seneca Valley High School and enter its IB Program.

Meanwhile, Watkins Mill High School sits here with a proven program, representative of its diverse student body, and we are losing students. Not outrageous enough? WMHS has not been permitted to approve even one single request for a COSA transfer from students who want to tackle an IB program and have no other option to do so. Even students who attend our elementary schools but then split-articulate to Clarksburg HS are denied the opportunity for an IB experience right in their own backyard!

Our IB Program can immediately accommodate 15 additional Juniors without adding a single class section or buying a single book. The Senior classes could handle at least 10 more kids with no impact whatsoever.

So I am here tonight, in this dire budget climate, to ask for one thing. One thing that can help us even *begin* to compete for students, and *which will cost absolutely nothing*. Please allow WMHS to approve transfers for students with no other access to an IB program.