

**Testimony of Amanda Waugh
Co President, Rock Creek Forest ES PTA
Community Forum, October 15, 2009**

Hello, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share my views. I am speaking tonight as a parent, as a taxpayer and as a co-president of the Rock Creek Forest Elementary School PTA.

Like all of us here tonight, I come to you aware of many of the challenges that face our school system. We see them in our own corner of MCPS.

Our economy is appears to be in recovery and yet, unemployment is high, prices are rising and enrollment is growing. We must do more with fewer resources.

Rock Creek Forest Elementary School is a complicated place. We have an immersion program drawing kids from across the county and a neighborhood English Academy that serves a diverse group of kids, both economically and ethnically.

Tonight, you are hearing from many parents and community leaders. I am sure you are also hearing from teachers, staff and administrators. Your decisions are tough.

But as a parent, a tax payer, and a PTA leader, I ask the following:

First, this is about our kids, their learning experience and the environment that they work in for hours every school day.

Second, this is about creating a relentless focus on those things that matter: class size, teacher ratios, and specific learning matters.

Third, this is about equality. Children at schools in less privileged communities should not be at a disadvantage, either by lack of technology or other key learning devices because their parents cannot contribute to directly augment the learning capabilities at their school. Too often we have seen wealthy schools supplemented with the generosity of their parent body while poorer schools struggle.

Please, hold the line on class sizes. It is so critical to our kid's educational experience.

In our English Academy, we had to add a first grade class to accommodate the demand and maintain the student teacher ratio. In our immersion program, kindergarten classes fill to 26 children due to the popularity of our program.

Every indication is that smaller classes support learning better than larger classes and frankly, it just makes sense. This last year our immersion program was cut a half time reading position, and while our dedicated staff has “made it work,” we are getting closer and closer to the bone with each cut.

Remember the kids, this is their one year in first, second, or third grade. They don’t have a chance to do it again. Make it count.

As you look for efficiencies, remember the kids, who are notoriously, wonderfully inefficient. It’s their charm.

They need one on one time with an experienced educator. They need small group time with a dedicated staff member. Kids won’t do more with less.

They are less likely to notice their textbook is old than they are to notice the 29 kids crammed into one 3rd grade classroom.

And while you are at it, remember the communities that brought you these kids. As diverse as Rock Creek Forest is, the county is even more so.

As you select cuts, please remember that they won’t be felt equally across the county. There are schools in Montgomery County where parents will simply buy more books, playground balls and Promethean boards out of their pocket. And I say this recognizing that my school, Rock Creek Forest is somewhere in the middle. But it troubles me and my community that there are schools that will never get a new ball that MCPS doesn’t give them. Those are kids who will never get a new ball except from MCPS.

The least we can do is keep them in a modestly sized class with a qualified educator where they can learn to their greatest potential.

Thank you for your time tonight, and for your work on behalf of my kids, Rock Creek Forest’s kids and all the kids in MCPS.