

**North West Advisory Council Pre-budget Hearing
October 21, 2004**

We had twenty-two citizens testify during our pre-budget meeting. It was evident through the testimony of several individuals that many were pleased with past help that has been given to the individual schools for various projects. Many thanked the board for this support.

That said, there are several areas that still need to be addressed. These items are not in priority order, but are all areas of need.

- Facilities continue to be a big issue. The bathrooms in many of the older buildings are in deplorable condition (tiles are missing, stall doors missing, paper towel holders broken and sinks broken). Our students' health is at risk. These facilities cannot be properly cleaned and sanitized. These conditions should be easily remedied and would go a long way to improve the morale in some of our most challenging, neediest schools.
- Maintenance in our buildings has not been properly addressed. Many schools are understaffed and regular cleaning is not taking place. Budget cuts have regularly burdened the custodial staffs. We must become proactive and maintain our buildings before the repairs become so costly that we cannot fix the problems.
- Air conditioning is an ongoing problem and some schools asked for units for certain areas until the entire air conditioning needs of the schools can be met. Areas have been recorded with temperatures greater than 100 degrees. Some health suites are without air conditioning units, which directly impacts the health of our students and staff who seek health services.
- Teacher and staff salaries continue to be a vital concern for attracting the most highly qualified teachers for our schools. We need to become highly competitive to allure teachers and retain them in our county.
- Assistants in kindergarten classes, especially in light of the new curriculum requirements, are imperative. The teachers are struggling to meet the individual needs of each child at the same time they are taking care of the rest of a class of young learners.
- Staffing is badly needed for classroom tutorials and after school programs. These programs are essential to properly address the needs of all students effectively. We assess the student needs, but don't provide the necessary resources to help those students we have identified as needing extra assistance.
- There are still transportation issues in some schools that have double bus shifts. Some children are made to wait for up to an hour for the bus to return to school. This is a recipe for trouble when the children are just waiting around for the bus to transport them home.

- Many schools are still struggling with copying issues. Copiers that don't work or are not large enough to handle the tasks required are still evident in buildings. Because of the demands, especially in the elementary curriculum, the paper being used is eating large parts of the individual school budgets, leaving less for other important items.
- Technology needs continue. Upgrades are continually needed to keep the technology up to date in our schools. Owings Mills High School is in need of an updated Mac Lab for their award winning newspaper. Chances are that other high schools are in similar situations for their school newspapers. Our technology should be kept up to date and functional to provide our students with the best possible education.
- The last item is the music program. Several people spoke to the issue of upgrading, repairing and refurbishing instruments and making sure space is adequate for the music programs to function. The music program in general needs to be fully funded. The gains that children make academically because of music have been well documented.

We know that priorities need to be set when making a budget. However, when some items are ignored year after year it becomes less cost effective than to have maintained those items regularly.

The council wishes to thank you for working on these issues.

Respectfully submitted,

Northwest Advisory Council
Abby Beytin, Chair