

Board Testimony
Howard County Executive Budget Hearing – March 5, 2019

Good evening, Dr. Ball and members of the public. I am Mavis Ellis, Chair of the Howard County Board of Education. On behalf of the entire Board, I appreciate this opportunity to present testimony on the Board's FY 2020 Budget Request, and to advocate for the 59,000 children attending our public schools.

Our FY 2020 request realistically defines the investments that must be made to begin to translate our shared values into reality for our rapidly growing system and growing needs.

The Board faced difficult decisions in weighing the needs presented in Superintendent Martirano's budget request, against expenses to accommodate enrollment growth and meet our obligations for staff salaries and health benefits, in view of the fiscal realities facing our county.

Our operating budget request identifies the minimal level of funding needed to meet our obligations, maintain class sizes at current levels in the face of rapid enrollment growth, and begin the first steps of a multi-year plan for fulfilling the critical needs identified by Dr. Martirano. This includes adding staff and resources to better support the intensive needs of students receiving special education services and those struggling with mental health issues, and to align levels with current staffing ratios.

Other high-priority needs include restorative practices and inclusive supports for minority and international students and families, and those impacted by poverty; much-needed maintenance projects and replacement of aging equipment and vehicles, which have been deferred for many years; equitable and upgraded classroom technology; and learning opportunities to prepare students for the 21st century workforce.

Our request identifies the minimal level of funding needed to maintain a steady course and begin to take our system forward, in the first phase of a multi-year plan to bridge the gap between where

our system is now, and where we need to be. It effectively provides for the very real needs of our students and prepares each child for a prosperous and productive future.

The Board of Education's budget request is not a budget of wants or even one that fulfills all of our needs. It is a budget that will meet the obligations we have to take care of the needs of our students, teachers, and staff and to take a step forward in areas that have been long ignored. We made some very tough decisions last year to set us on a sound fiscal path, cutting programs and even making the tough decision to increase class sizes. We were pleased that through your leadership on the County Council we were able to maintain class sizes. This year again, if we don't receive enough funding to meet the Board's obligations, we will be faced with difficult choices. I've included with my testimony two memos that outline the tough choices we face with our operating budget.

Our capital budget includes funding to support construction of a replacement Talbott Springs Elementary School, scheduled to open in fall 2022; construction of our county's 13th high school, targeted to open in fall 2023; and a renovation and addition to Hammond High School, scheduled for completion in fall 2023. These upgrades will provide needed relief for school overcapacity and provide for facilities well-suited to current teaching and learning practices.

Dr. Ball, as you stated last week, our time is now to make the bold decisions to do what is needed for our children. We must do everything within our power to provide them with the necessary supports and resources, so that they may thrive in school and will realize success beyond. As I stated, this is not just a school system budget but a community budget. The needs that the Board and Superintendent outlined in our request support the whole child and their family with necessary supports to ensure their mental and physical health is tended to, their safety ensured, and they have the tools to thrive as a 21st century learner. The Board of Education looks forward to working collaboratively with the County to make bold decisions in order to meet the needs of all students in the Howard County Public School System.

Mavis Ellis

Chair, Howard County Board of Education