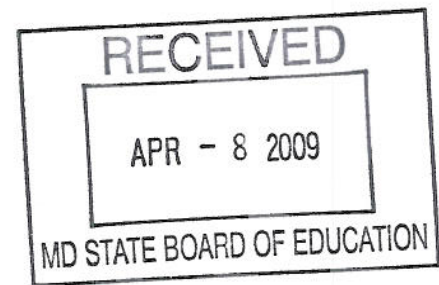


# Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee of Worcester County

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3 April 2009

Mr. James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr., President  
Maryland State Board of Education  
Maryland State Department of Education  
200 West Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201



Re: Maintenance of Effort Worcester County - Opposed

Dear Mr. DeGraffenreidt,

I am writing today on behalf of the Special Education Citizen's Advisory Committee (SECAC) of Worcester County over our concerns for Worcester County Public School funding. Our committee along with many parents across Worcester County is extremely proud of our school system. Our successes are evident across the board from our top MSA scores, the highest graduation rates in our state, student successes with the new HSA requirement, the highest concentration of Blue Ribbon Schools, as well as being recognized as a top performing school system in the state of Maryland. In terms of our Special Education services, we are proud that we rank 3<sup>rd</sup> in the state for having over 87% of our students with disabilities fully included in a regular classroom.

Our school system receives 76% of their budget from our county government. It is worth noting that Worcester County Schools was recently recognized for their efficient use of the small percentage of funding from the state. We believe the evidence clearly shows that our Board of Education has also spent the county funds wisely and has given our county an excellent return on their investment.

Now our County Commissioners have asked that our Board of Education submit a FY 2010 operating budget that reflects a 3% reduction from the current year's budget. Unfortunately, due to rising fixed costs that include utilities, unemployment, and workers compensation, the board is actually being asked to reallocate or cut over \$3.6 million. Since there are so many fixed costs that are rising and cannot be cut, these cuts will go to Special Education and Instructional programs that will directly impact our children and leave operational scars in our schools that may take years to overcome.

There is a Maintenance of Effort (MOE) statute that prevents a county from not funding at least as much per-student in the upcoming school year as they are currently funding. In addition, if a school system budget does not meet MOE requirements from the county, they become ineligible for state aid. Our Superintendent and staff have come up with a MOE budget, which would still significantly impact instructional materials. The difference between the 3% reduction and the MOE budget is \$1.8 million.

Our concern is that if this waiver for MOE is granted, our children will be the ones who lose. The cuts to the instructional programs and particularly to the Special Education budget will

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absolutely put kids at risk for failure. With an increase in mandates, that are not fully funded, for students to achieve on state assessments, in addition to cutbacks in Special Education, there will be an impact on the most vulnerable students in our school population. There is also concern that with less funding leading to fewer services, we will be putting our school system at risk for an increase in needless litigation.

In conclusion, we recognize that our economy is facing enormous challenges. However, Worcester County has a fund balance of \$46.3 million. The school system and teachers have agreed to tighten their belts and get by with less, but there has been no room for compromise from the Commissioners. The MOE statute would seem to be in place for this very reason. We are asking that the request for a waiver to be denied so that we can keep our school system strong and serving our most important constituents – our children.

Thank you for your time and attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

The Special Education Citizen's Advisory Committee of Worcester County



Michelle Schachter



Carl Hansen