

City Council Budget Hearing
April 8, 2002
Draft

Mount Vernon Community School PTA
Sheryl K. Gorsuch, President

Good Evening Mayor Donnelly, City Council Members and Alexandria Residents. My name is Sheryl Gorsuch, and I am the PTA President at Mount Vernon Community School. I speak this evening on behalf of our children.

We fully support the School Budget as prepared by Ms. Perry and the School Board. And we thank the council for its strong support of public education in the past and into the future. It is important that city residents and elected officials are aware of the successes at Mount Vernon Community School (MV). The school budget comprises the largest portion of the city budget, and it is money well spent.

We are proud of our recent accomplishments at MV. Our SOL test results have skyrocketed in the past few years. MV earned provisional accreditation last year, and we missed full accreditation by a very slim margin. We look forward to meeting our full accreditation goal *this* year! The tremendous turnaround in our school didn't happen by accident. The funding initiatives over the past 2 years targeting schools with low income families have helped greatly and need to be continued. Our dedicated school staff has worked hard creating an enthusiastic learning environment and making this additional program money work well for our students. Reduced class sizes have enabled our teachers to evaluate and work better with every child.

The proposed budget continues to support our current class sizes throughout the city. We feel strongly that small class sizes are the key to successful learning. Additional support staff throughout the school is also vital to our continued success. Although our enrollment has dropped below the predicted level this year, one year is not sufficient to change our growth expectations. We urge the council to expect enrollment increases in the near future and continue your commitment to education excellence by fully supporting the budget which **holds the line on student-teacher ratios and continues funding of special support staff.**

There is much more happening at MV than just good test results. Our K-1 dual language program is very popular. Not only are the kids thriving in both English and Spanish, we see strong involvement from parents within the program. Additionally, our bilingual teachers and parent liaison are reaching out to our Hispanic families throughout the school. They create and facilitate opportunities for our Spanish speaking parents to participate fully in their child's education. We look forward to **continued funding and further expansion of the dual language program** to all grades at MV in the years ahead.

There are great events happening at MV throughout the day and into the evening. Our parents are learning in the same building as their children through adult ESL classes, tutoring programs, parenting classes and pta activities. We even have over 30 parents and staff learning Spanish. Our school is also used by various civic groups and organizations, many attended by our parents along with other community members. Money invested in our school benefits and reaches many people besides students.

The proposed school budget is very conservative. It leaves out important initiatives that need additional funds. Adequate and competitive pay for teachers will continue to be a priority. Our teachers work very hard and for very long hours. They serve on school committees, volunteer after school for extra tutoring and focus all their efforts on meeting the standards of learning. Math, Science and Bi-lingual teachers are in high demand and low supply throughout the country. Better bonuses and priority hiring programs for expert teachers are needed. Pay differentials for teachers who handle a great deal of responsibility in addition to their regular classroom duties will enable us to attract and keep the best teachers. Please plan on future funding of competitive pay for teachers with additional bonuses and differentials for teachers with special qualifications.

Many elementary schools have requested science teachers or staff to assist in setting up experiments and maintaining science equipment supplies. A science teacher would help improve academic achievement and test scores by generating exciting, hands-on, and practical experience for our students. Science staff could also focus on integrating science with other subjects to further enhance student learning, creating motivated and enthusiastic learners. We hope to see enhancements in the science curriculum by providing specialized science staff at each school

We encourage you to remain committed to the long-term goal of educational excellence. Now, perhaps more than any other time in our lifetimes, our community should work together to provide children with the knowledge, experience and training they need to successfully shape and face the future.

Thank you.