

**MCCPTA Testimony to the County Council
on the FY 2008 Operating Budget
April 9, 2008
Jane de Winter, President MCCPTA**

On behalf of all MCCPTA members I would like to thank the County Council for this opportunity to testify before you this evening in support of the Board of Education's FY2008 Operating Budget Request.

This budget makes significant progress toward MCCPTA priorities as outlined in our FY 2008 Operating Budget Compact, the Resolution on FY 2008 Operating Budget Priorities, and the Resolution on Health Technicians which are attached. MCCPTA focused on eight operating budget priorities this year and this testimony will address the progress this budget request makes on them.

First, I would like to make some observations on the budget process this year. It is unfortunate that some in our county are shifting the process to one which pits schools against the rest of the county or vice versa. Indeed by the very manner in which testimony has been scheduled this week, the council appears to be endorsing the notion that there is a trade off between excellent schools for students and good services for the rest of the county.

This is a flawed perspective. The 50,000 members of the Montgomery County Council of PTAs are residents and taxpayers too. They want a safe county with good libraries; they understand the challenges of affordable housing; they appreciate the need for mental health services; parks; and transportation. The 50,000 members of MCCPTA also believe that the residents of Montgomery County want an excellent public school system to maintain the quality of life; to graduate students qualified for higher education and/or employment; and to continue to be a magnet for businesses and individuals. The 50,000 members of MCCPTA also want a school system which supports our most vulnerable students: the students whose parents struggle to feed and clothe them; the non-English speaking students; the students with disabilities; the students with unmet health needs; the students whose parents are disengaged; the students who need us the most.

MCCPTA endorses another perspective. That is that the residents of Montgomery County are intelligent and civic minded enough to see that the focus of the discussion ought to be, what do we want our schools and county to look like and what does it take to get us there? Over the past few years the County Council has stepped up when funding from the state has fallen short and MCCPTA appreciates that the Council has a strong history of supporting schools and education. We renew our pledge to advocate for Montgomery County's fair share of state funding to reduce the burden on local taxpayers.

While MCCPTA specifically enumerated seven priorities in its Resolution on FY 2008 Operating Budget Priorities with a separate Resolution on Health Techs, we feel the need to remind you that our organization's number one priority has consistently been to lower class size. This was not included in the list of eight FY 2008 priorities because we

believed there was clear support for the direction the school system has been headed on class size, but we no longer are sure that all of our elected officials support past initiatives on class size. We do not want to reverse course on class size.

Regarding our FY 2008 Operating Budget Priorities:

There are several new items in this budget that should address our goal of **increasing secondary literacy**. These include the middle school Literacy Coaches and expansion of reading interventions. A number of the middle school report recommendations may help **close the achievement gap**.

MCCPTA strongly endorses the addition of counselors at both the high school and middle school levels to address our priority to **expand after school programs and in school programs for prevention and intervention of bullying and gang activity**. We support funding for youth violence prevention/intervention including sports academies.

Adding 10 new middle schools clearly addresses our priority to **expand the Special Education Hours based Staffing Model**. We support funding this model in all schools. Regarding secondary learning centers—MCCPTA is pleased that the Council took an interest in this matter which allowed more questions and concerns to come to light and raised the idea of a special education audit. If nothing else, the urgency which MCPS feels regarding middle school student achievement highlights that we still have a long way to go in providing programs to ensure the success of every student and that more resources are needed to address persistent achievement gaps in middle and high schools among both special education and regular education students. This budget should be providing every incentive toward filling teacher and para-educator vacancies rather than promoting the use of long term substitutes as a cost saving measure.

It is disappointing that this budget provides no new funding to **increase the number of Parent Community Outreach Coordinators** within the Department of Communications. MCCPTA has advocated for school based bilingual staff dedicated to parent outreach for several years and will continue to do so.

We also find this budget makes no progress towards our goal of **safe, secure, clean, healthy, modern school facilities**. MCPS must address the enormous backlog of maintenance projects which we have been told currently stands at \$40-50 million and would take increased annual expenditures in the neighborhood of \$7 million to eliminate and stay current once the backlog was eliminated.

Several items in this budget may **improve the curriculum roll out process** but there are some cuts in curriculum writing stipends that may prove counterproductive. Some positive steps are the addition of middle school content specialists, curriculum supervisors to develop math, reading, and writing assessments, benchmarks, and technology tools, and the decision to finally develop an explicit sequence of GT curriculum in the current curriculum guides.

MCCPTA also supports funding within the HHS budget to **increase health tech staffing** allocation to seven hours per school so that a health tech can be on duty for the entire school day. We are also pleased to see funding for the Linkages to Learning programs continued.

As our cluster coordinators testify tonight and on the remaining two nights of these hearings, we urge you to listen to the needs within their schools and how MCPS initiatives have begun to address these needs.

Again, on behalf of MCCPTA, I thank you for your time tonight and urge you to fully fund the Board of Education's FY 2008 Operating Budget Request.