



**Testimony before the Board of Education on
The Superintendent's Recommended FY 2009 Operating Budget
January 9, 2008**

Good Evening President Navarro, Dr. Weast, and Members of the Board of Education. My name is Jane de Winter, and I serve as President of the Montgomery County Council of PTAs, which represent parents, teachers, and students in schools across the county. On behalf of all MCCPTA members I would like to thank the Board of Education for this opportunity to testify this evening on the Superintendent's Recommended FY 2009 Operating Budget. MCCPTA thanks the Board for their continuing work to craft the Strategic Planning Forums into a useful process and we urge the Board to draw on this year's success in future years. MCCPTA members also note the significant improvements in the budget documents, especially the new Operating Budget Summary. Finally, I would like to thank the Superintendent for opening the door for MCCPTA to participate in the budget development process. MCCPTA has made significant changes over the past four years to enable it to gather input from its members in order to focus on the organization's highest budget priorities. We appreciate the opportunity to bring these priorities to the table.

This is unquestionably a difficult budget, which makes notable progress towards the MCCPTA priorities outlined in our FY 2009 Operating Budget Compact and Resolution on FY 2009 Operating Budget Priorities, copies of which are provided with my testimony. It is clear that the next few budget years will also be difficult as MCPS seeks to extend its successes in the elementary schools to all middle and high schools while increases in state aid stall and the economic climate remains unfavorable. There will be some tough choices ahead. This makes the ability to evaluate programs that much more critical. There was discussion at our forum Monday evening about the capacity of the Department of Shared Accountability. MCCPTA has concerns that the internal realignments within that Department will make it even more difficult to do the work that must be accomplished in order to provide a sound educational basis for tough budget choices. There are a number of recent initiatives and even long standing programs about which we still have no hard data to guide decision making. We also question whether the Department of Reporting and Regulatory Accountability is adequately staffed based on the increasing lag in the release of Schools at a Glance information each year. MCCPTA members rely on that information and not having Schools at a Glance available until March has a negative effect on our ability to advocate for students and local schools.

We believe that evaluating more programs and releasing local school data sooner would facilitate the types of broad ranging discussions that the Board has initiated with its Monday night meetings. There are many programs and staffing patterns where discussion and analysis

seems to only come up in the context of the budget; we all should be seeking to tackle policy and programmatic decisions with the best information we have and with full participation from all stakeholders. Then, when budget choices need to be made, we know what the trade-offs are.

MCCPTA focused on eight Operating Budget priorities this year, and I am going to briefly discuss the progress this budget proposal makes on several of them. First, we support the recommendation to add **six local school-based parent community outreach coordinators** and the realignments within the Division of Family and Community Partners which add two additional parent community outreach coordinators, in order to provide more effective communication – including bilingual services – to the parent community that is such a crucial part of any student’s success. We also support the proposed addition of **five additional elementary school counselors and one ESOL counselor**, in order to reduce the student-counselor ratios at the most overburdened schools and provide services to more ESOL students.

The implementation of **Middle School Reform** is likewise an important budget priority for MCCPTA, and the proposed budget goes a long way towards achieving that objective, with \$5 million for the expansion of MS Reform to nine new schools, continuing the Middle School Magnet Consortium at Argyle, Parkland, and Loiederman, and expanding magnet courses to additional middle schools within the DCC. The modest expansion of the Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) program to reduce student disciplinary issues has the potential to address MCCPTA’s **gang prevention and intervention** priority, while the nearly \$1 million for nearly eighteen additional special education teachers and paraeducators to support expanded hours-based special education instruction will be important to achieving the goal of **remediation and support for all students who need such services** as well as the expansion of the Students Engaged in Pathways to Achievement (SEPA) program.

Regarding MCCPTA’s goal of **staff development and teacher improvement**, the proposed budget provides for one development specialist position to expand the Professional Learning Communities Institute, and other opportunities to expand professional training through the PBIS funding, and training which is imbedded in the funding for the 3 Middle School initiatives. We note the cut of 7 Staff Development Specialists but hope that the work can be reorganized so that the remaining SDS can provide more direct support to staff development teachers at local schools. Parents have had a great deal of concern with the safety of students during recess and MCCPTA supports the proposal for sixteen new lunch hour aides, which is intended to improve recess coverage to a ratio of 45:1. We would also like to see explicit training for lunch/recess aides to assist them with behavioral management and bullying issues, especially for those aides who do not also work as para-educators and thus do not benefit from the professional development available to other support personnel.

We support the Superintendent’s recommendation of \$1 million for ten additional elementary school assistant principals, which is a feature of the MCCPTA Operating Budget Compact.

Our members express a great many concerns with **transportation services**. Adequate activity bus service is a vital piece in the efforts to engage students in after school activities and provide them with productive uses of their time. We are pleased to see that Middle School

Reform funds an increase in activity bus service and that MCPS is continuing the effort started this year to provide expanded and equitable activity bus service to elementary schools. However, the importance of future improvements in bus service cannot be minimized and the delay in bus replacements jeopardizes the entire fleet replacement schedule, and will almost certainly lead to increased fuel and maintenance costs for the aging fleet while at the same time delaying the upgrade to buses that minimize the overcrowding many students complain of due to inadequate seat size (also known as rump room). We know the Department of Transportation has found some savings by rerouting bus runs and we hope that it remains flexible next fall should these revised routes result in overcrowding.

MCCPTA members have long supported improved **maintenance of school facilities** and **safe, secure, clean, and healthy school facilities**; the lack of increased expenditures for maintenance means that the \$40-50 million backlog of maintenance projects will remain and likely worsen, potentially impacting the safety and health of our students and teachers. Parents remain concerned with the adequacy of the Indoor Air Quality Team staffing and we urge you to consider an increase in positions here.

MCCPTA does not feel the proposed budget adequately addresses the needs in our high schools. It is our impression that MCPS is waiting to address high school issues until it has finished rolling out Middle School Reform much as it waited to address middle school issues until it had implemented significant changes in elementary schools. With the continuing achievement gap, highlighted by the disparities in eligibility rates, and the looming HSAs, we have grave concerns that high schools can't wait.

We appreciate that in this tight budget year, approximately half of the budget cuts are in the central office. Our continuing priority is direct services to students and we urge you to continue to examine where efficiencies in the central office can be achieved. Where there are local school cuts, such as the reductions in release periods in magnet and immersion programs, we urge you to continue to support developing programs so that these can achieve the same high levels that more established programs have achieved. We also urge you to consider a pilot program in a cluster or in individual schools whereby parents can select to have MCPS publications delivered by email and/or web link rather than by U.S. mail.

MCCPTA cluster coordinators will testify tonight and next week and raise specific concerns. Please listen to them and let their thoughts guide you as you make decisions on this recommended budget. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify tonight, and for the time, dedication, and consideration you provide to Montgomery County's students. MCCPTA looks forward to continuing to work with you as we work to secure the funding our children need to succeed and excel in Montgomery County.

Attachments:

MCCPTA FY2009 Operating Budget Compact

MCCPTA Resolution on FY 2009 Operating Budget Priorities