

April 7, 2008

The Northeast Consortium

A Consortium of the Blake, Paint Branch and Springbrook Clusters

Comments on the FY 2009 Capital Budget

On behalf of the NEC Middle Schools

Benjamin Banneker

Briggs Chaney

William Farquhar

Francis Scott Key

White Oak

Good evening President Knapp and members of the County Council. My name is Naghma Husain and I am one of the Springbrook Cluster Coordinators. I am here to speak to the needs of the consortium's five middle schools— Benjamin Banneker, Briggs Chaney, Farquhar, Key and White Oak.

We appreciate your generous support and dedication over the years to the education of our children. In these times of financial difficulty, we understand tough choices must be made. We urge you not to short change our children. A quality education is paramount for their future success.

A quality education is also one of the defining aspects of Montgomery County. Without full funding of the FY2009 Budget, our schools may fall behind leaving Montgomery County no longer the residence of choice.

At our various PTA meetings, parents have repeatedly expressed many common concerns. The most important is class size. If there are budget shortfalls, teaching positions will likely be cut resulting in increased class size. Smaller class size initiatives in impacted schools such as ours have resulted in better test scores and a decrease in the Achievement Gap. Larger class sizes resulting from inadequate funding will especially hurt our most vulnerable students.

We are also concerned about adequate staffing for our inclusion classes resulting from the closing of our secondary special education learning centers. Throwing another body in the classroom is simply not enough. These students in particular, require smaller class sizes in order to be taught effectively, without which, more schools will fail the Special Education marker for AYP. In many cases, Special Education is the only category that causes a school to miss AYP.

Our community is also concerned with the lack of adequate after school activity bus service. This is a vital piece in the effort to engage students in after school activities. Research has consistently proven that students involved in after school activities perform better in the classroom. Many students are unable to participate because they do not have a ride home. Currently, activity bus

rides can last over an hour, dropping children long distances from their homes, sometimes in different places depending on who the driver happens to be that day. In addition, during the winter months, they must walk these long distances home alone in the dark.

The NEC clusters also support the continuation of funds necessary to implement Middle School Reform. This is a crucial initiative which serves to raise the achievement and success rates for our middle school students. Currently there are only five schools that have been able to benefit from this reform. Appropriate funding must be in place to allow the Middle School Reform to expand to more schools as well as fully support implementation of Phase II at the first five schools.

Without full funding, additional initiatives that may be cut are:

- *Parent Community Coordinators for schools with large immigrant populations.

- *Adequate staffing for ESOL, Special Education and Staff Development.

- *Additional guidance counselors.

- *Assistant principals in elementary schools.

- *Increased services in the red zone.

- *Reform efforts to improve math and literacy.

Middle school is an important time both socially and academically. Our students need to be prepared for the independence and rigor of high school. These programs must remain in place in order to continue to raise their achievement and success rates.

Please do not allow any reductions to currently funded beneficial programs and keep new programs on track. Without full funding of the FY2009 Budget, we risk a greater number of students falling behind and an increase in schools not making AYP. Please do not allow this to happen. Please keep Montgomery County as an excellent place to educate our children.

Thank you for your time and continued efforts to support the success of our students.

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