

THE NORTHEAST CONSORTIUM
A Consortium of the Blake, Paint Branch and Springbrook Clusters

Comments on the FY 2009 Operating Budget

On behalf of The NEC High Schools

April 7, 2008

Blake High School
Paint Branch High School
Springbrook High School

Good evening President Knapp and members of the Montgomery County Council. My name is Patti Twigg and I am the Paint Branch Cluster Coordinator. I am here tonight to speak on behalf of the three exceptional high schools in our Consortium — Blake, Paint Branch and Springbrook. Let me begin by saying that the Northeast Consortium strongly supports the MCCPTA FY 2009 Operating Budget Compact and Resolution on Operating Budget Priorities.

Let me give you a brief snapshot of the high schools of the Northeast Consortium. According to Schools at a Glance, 2007 edition, our Ever FARMS rates vary from 33.8 to 55.4%. Our mobility rates vary from 13.9 to 16.4%. Students that receive special education services vary from 8.2 to 8.6% of the total school population.

The high schools of the Northeast Consortium recognize that this will be a difficult budget year. We understand and accept that cuts are to be expected. However, we feel it is also important to focus on the fact that we are talking about children, not numbers. Meeting the ever-increasing needs of our students is our primary goal, and adequate staffing is key.

Starting next year, our high school students will need to have passed the requisite number of high school assessments in order to receive a diploma. Crunch time is here; in fact it is past due. We must assure success for these students. Adequate staffing in our classrooms is critical to this endeavor. We are opposed to any action that would increase class sizes.

With the phasing out of the Secondary Learning Centers, we are also concerned about inadequate staffing for the inclusion classes that are replacing them. We wish the solution were as simple as just adding another adult in a classroom, but of course, life is never simple. Inclusion classes need class size reductions as well as additional staffing. We are anxiously awaiting the reports from the Learning Center Transition Evaluation Advisory Group and the Secondary Learning Center Transition Project Management Team to find out how the current phase out is working.

Parent Community Coordinators are very important to our schools. Parent involvement in the education process is a demonstrated factor in student success, and reaching out to parents in normally underserved demographic groups is critical to the success of our most vulnerable students in high school and beyond. In the same way, the retention of the prior year initiative to increase the

number of high school counselors, and the retention of Staff Development specialists are very important, especially since our schools have found they make a significant difference.

The maintenance of our aging buildings continues to be a concern. As I pointed out in my CIP testimony in February, it took almost 2 months to fabricate parts for the inoperative fire alarm system at Paint Branch high school. As I said at that time, as our schools continue to age, we can certainly expect these types of problems to keep cropping up, and with greater frequency. We feel that better preventative maintenance of our schools is the only cost effective solution.

Last summer, our quad cluster held a long discussion regarding activity buses. These buses are necessary in order for all our students to participate in the full range of extra curricular, athletic and learning support activities available to high school students. Students involved in their school's activities consistently perform better in the classroom. The issue is that activity buses drop students off unreasonably far from their homes, requiring those students to walk long distances alone, sometimes in the dark of winter's early sunset. Add that to the long duration of the activity bus ride, and it is no wonder many students choose not to stay after school or are forced to find sometimes less safe alternative methods of getting home.

In closing, we believe that our partnership with you in working for the best for all our students, families and staff shows a strong commitment to our common goals. As I said earlier, we all realize that the budget is very tight this year and that difficult choices must be made. We appreciate your careful and thoughtful consideration of our concerns and support you in your efforts to close the budget gap.

Respectfully,

The Northeast Consortium Cluster Coordinators

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