

Montgomery County Board of Education
2008 Operating Budget Testimony
John F. Kennedy Cluster
January 11, 2007

Good evening. My name is Ricky Ford and along with Dan Gaskill and Karen Sullivan, I serve as a co-coordinator for the John F. Kennedy Cluster of schools. On behalf of the Kennedy Cluster, thank you for allowing me to speak about the operating budget recommended by the Superintendent.

The Kennedy Cluster supports the Superintendent's recommended \$1.98 billion Operating Budget for FY 2007. In addition, we support the MCCPTA testimony presented by the MCCPTA President, Jane de Winter and the MCCPTA Budget Compact. The specific areas of concern that were referenced by Jane include:

- Middle school Literacy Coaches and expansion of reading interventions as a way of closing the achievement gap.
- 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.
- The increase in funding for middle school activity buses.
- The lack of additional funding to increase the number of Parent Community Outreach Coordinators.

The following items should be considered as you review the 2008 operating budget:

- Plan before you land. Know how changes will affect learning and all the people involved.
- Two way communication. Communication is more than just being informed of things by the school system, and is more than parents just receiving documents. Parents must have input into decisions, not learn about them after the fact, having one parent sitting on a committee is not necessarily the same as getting parent input, and parents must be able to communicate with their children's school in their own language.
- We want a budget that is "meeting every student's needs" the emphasis is on every student as an individual, not a part of a cohort, or part of a special population, or lumped in as a group in AYP calculations.

We are pleased with the proposed funding for an additional 15 assistant principals. There is only one elementary school in the DCC without an assistant principal, Glenallan Elementary. Glenallan has a heavy load factor (ESOL/FARM percentages and a high mobility rate) and we strongly support the assignment of an assistant principal to Glenallan.

We would like to ensure that MCPS continues funding for the Middle School Magnet Consortium (MSMC) of which Argyle Middle School, of the Kennedy Cluster, is a

member. We would like to ensure that the Middle School Consortium is adequately funded so that it can meet its objective. A review of the data shows that this endeavor has been successful and is having a positive impact on the community.

The MS reform report outlines the MCPS proposed spending the \$2.5 million that was labeled as MS reform money. The 5 schools refer to the 5 middle schools that will pilot the changes. Other things will go to all schools. There is \$1.6 million proposed for middle school reforms this year. We would like a clarification of where the money is coming from.

We are concerned about the proposed phase-out of the Secondary Learning Centers. We support the MCCPTA Special Education Committee's resolution. The Kennedy cluster is the only cluster with two schools that have Learning Centers that will be phased out (Lee Middle School and Kennedy High School). Our concern is about the continuum of services that will be available to special education students and the impact of this decision on all schools.

The decision to close the Learning Centers will have a major impact on the Kennedy Cluster and, as a result, we would like to request that Lee and Kennedy be allowed to use the Special Education Hours based Staffing Model. We also support funding this model in all schools because all secondary schools will be impacted by this decision.

We have reviewed the Realignment of Special Education Service Delivery White Paper and understand all of the ideas presented in the document that relate to the decision to close the Learning Centers. We are concerned about how students will be affected by closing the learning centers under their IEPs? Why weren't parents asked to provide input on this plan before it was announced? What data is available to support inclusion for students with all IEPs? What does success look like? And finally, what is the backup plan if inclusion does not work?

To have success for every student, as noted in Goal 1 of the Strategic Plan, MCPS should reexamine its strategy of merely having more students take one or more AP or honors classes as a measure of success.

Students who are unprepared for these classes will be unsuccessful, as measured by poor class grades, poor AP grades, or inability to sit for the exam. There is no mention of providing the necessary supports to students who are prepared to take challenging classes but need additional support systems to be successful. In the report, put out in 2006, by the MCPS Office of Information and Organizational Systems, MCPS acknowledges in the discussion that challenges remain toward increasing AP exam participation and performance specifically in demographic populations. The report also notes "wide variations in the AP exam participation and performance of graduates who attend different high schools." As stated in the report, MCPS must evaluate AP participation, performance, course enrollment, and the need to add teacher preparation and training, at each of the high schools to improve this for all students.

Changing the evening school model is a good idea. Moving to extended day and giving schools flexibility to adjust schedules that work for students is excellent. Oftentimes, students who spend a significant portion of their time retaking classes in Night School are the students who need additional support. However, with absolutely NO data or evaluation from the pilot, it seems too early to change all schools to extended days. There is absolutely no school that does not have at least one student who at some point needs to retake a class. The extended day begs asking many questions: Will a class be offered at a school for as few as two students, or five or 10 or will 15 be required to hold a class? How will resources be allocated among the high schools for staffing? What accommodations will be made to offer evening classes for students who work after school, care for siblings or grandparents, or play sports? How does this model interface with support to students who fail an HSA, but pass the course at their school? We encourage the Board to move more slowly with full implementation of this program and to communicate with schools and the community how this will affect students and their ability to earn a HS diploma.

Emphasis on SATs may be misplaced since an increasing number of colleges are now accepting alternative testing including SAT IIs, subject area tests, IB exams and the ACT. If students are expected to give up an elective to take an SAT prep course during the day, the course must be well organized and productive. Many SAT prep courses in the DCC schools are simply a waste of time.

In summary we recommend the following:

- An assistant principal be assigned to Glenallan ES.
- Lee MS and Kennedy HS are allowed to use the Special Education Hours based Staffing Model.
- MCPS should reexamine its strategy of merely having more students take one or more AP or honors classes as a measure of success.

The Kennedy Cluster stands ready to respond creatively to the challenges presented by our diverse community. But MCPS cannot respond to those needs if there isn't collaborative communication between it and the parent community.

Thank you for your attention to these matters.