

REGARDING THE FY2008 RECOMMENDED OPERATING BUDGET

Testimony of:

THE NORTHEAST CONSORTIUM

January 11, 2006

Good evening, President Navarro, members of the Board of Education and Dr. Weast. I am Aaron Campbell, a senior at Springbrook High School and a member of the recent Northeast Consortium Study Circle about the impact of race and ethnicity on the preferred choice process. I was invited to speak to you tonight, on behalf of the Northeast Consortium. I am pleased to convey the Study Circle recommendations, as many are directly relevant to the operating budget.

We're all here tonight because we have the same number one goal – to ensure success for every student. In the Northeast Consortium – now approaching its **10th** year – we are proud of the increasing academic achievement of our students. We believe we have the potential to be a national model for closing the achievement gap. We strive for a consortium of world-class high schools where our diversity is an asset, and each student is fully engaged in learning. Achieving excellence requires many tools, among them willingness to examine any and all barriers. For this reason, NEC study circle participants asked:

"How Does Race Impact High School Choice in the Northeast Consortium?"

Twenty-three parents, teachers, and students from the three Northeast Consortium high schools talked about this during a facilitated Study Circle that met for six 2-hour sessions last spring. The findings of the group, along with specific recommendations for action, were presented in June to our high school principals and community superintendent. An advisory committee, made of of study circle participants, was established in July. We now bring these recommendations to your attention because many of them are impacted by the operating budget and we will need your leadership and vision in order to succeed.

Study circle participants identified ways in which **perceptions** related to the racial and economic make-up of each school contribute to polarization among the schools, obscure student and staff accomplishments, and impact the high school choice process. In addition, factors which may increase the impact of these perceptions, such as differences among the schools in terms of facilities, parent resources, perceived strength and/or interest to the community of signature programs, and response to discipline issues were identified. Finally, issues affecting all three schools, including counselor availability and training, and portrayal in the media were discussed. All of these issues get in the way of the primary goal – the consortium's ability to provide the best education for all students.

The complete recommendations were submitted with this written testimony, and you have them in your packets. Here is an overview:

Regarding MISPERCEPTIONS of the 3 High Schools in the Community

We need an NEC-wide communication strategy to enhance the reputation of the NEC as a whole, including a positive emphasis on the importance of diversity. These recommendations seek to directly address some of the racial and ethnic stereotypes used in the community to characterize each of the NEC high schools.

1. Begin the high school choice education process earlier in middle school;
2. Commit to **complete** transparency on the choice process. With regard to the budget, the consortium office needs to have enough staff, and a clear mandate to resolve confusion about the choice process.
3. Make decisions that affect all three schools (for example, changing the number of available seats at any of the three schools) with the awareness of stakeholders from all three schools.
4. Convene more study circles (including parents, students and staff) focused on the impact of race and ethnicity on all aspects of academic achievement. This is a low cost, enormous return intervention.

Regarding EQUITY Among the 3 High Schools

The study circle recommends continuing to identify ways to remedy the wide variations in educational load at the high schools, The use of the EVER FARMS marker in the preferred choice process had this effect for this year's ninth grade class. However this goal is accomplished, we seek MCPS support in our efforts to value the contributions and needs of all students equally.

1. We want the Board of Education to consider how schools with greater financial needs in the community can still have enough money to fully finance meaningful components of high school life, such as the school newspaper, band, drama and sports.
2. We need the Board of Education to support our efforts to communicate the academic successes of each high school, and the similar challenges faced by each of the high schools with regard to discipline.
3. MCPS support is needed to ensure that the signature programs at each high school are equally compelling, identifiable, and reasonably distinct .

Regarding HIGH EXPECTATIONS for All Students

Ultimately the importance of the NEC lies in its ability to provide the highest quality education to all students, while meeting the academic needs of individual students. In this context, recommendations were made concerning the need for increased parent involvement through meaningful parent/ school partnerships, more counselors, and ongoing education about the **benefits** of diversity at each school. Action steps include:

1. Hire more guidance counselors, and provide more training with regard to meeting the needs of a richly diverse student body. With a counselor student ratio of 1:250 and beyond, it is a county-wide issue that guidance counselors do not have enough time to meet even the scheduling needs of their students. As Ms. Salas-Kos, who also testified for the Northeast Consortium, pointed out, Spanish speaking counselors must be available at each school. Deleted:
2. Also related to earlier NEC testimony is the recommendation for increased parent outreach efforts, as in the example of parent liaison positions at each high school. Parents need to understand how to advocate for their child, and how to access support when needed.
3. Set uniformly high expectations for teachers and for students. In the study circle, we discussed a variety of experiences where racial bias seemed to interfere with educational outcome. Some of these experiences included being advised to take less challenging coursework than was indicated and accepting lower academic achievement from students of color.

In summary, the Study Circle recommendations are intended to promote academic achievement of each student in the consortium by eliminating the negative stereotypes held to varying degrees about individual NEC high schools and further strengthening the positives each school offers. The NEC Study Circle reflects strong and committed community involvement, and we invite the Board to help multiply our efforts. With your commitment, we can more fully achieve our vision for educational excellence for all students in the NEC. We ask for your support in strengthening the NEC by:

1. Continuing the work of the Advisory Group formed as an outgrowth of the NEC study circle.
2. Continue commitment to balancing educational load and resources within the consortium.
3. Consider funding “equalizer” to ensure that all NEC high school students have resources to offer similar opportunities in activities such as the school newspaper, band, drama and sports.
4. Provide media coordination and/or oversight within the NEC office to ensure balanced coverage of all three schools.

Thank you.

Northeast Consortium Study Circle
Does Race Impact School Choice in the Northeast Consortium?
June 8th, 2006

The participants prioritized three areas for action: Equity, Misperceptions, and High Expectations. They then divided in to work teams to further clarify suggested action steps.

EQUITY WORK TEAM

Members: Sabrina Austin, Orit Chicherio, Talia Chicherio, Jeffrey Marshall, Anne Regan and Kathleen Whitman.
 Team members who would participate in a Working Committee with the Consortium: Sabrina; Anne, Kathleen

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|-------------------------|-----------------|--|
| Equity | Definition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fair and balanced distribution of educational load across each of the three NEC high schools • Fair and balanced distribution of resources across the three high schools |
| Educational Load | MCPS definition | Demographic features related to academic achievement levels. Relevant indicators include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of school's enrollment that has ever received free and reduced price meals (ever FARMS rate) • Mobility • Older than "grade age" • ESOL participation • METS • Special Education |
| Resources | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operating budget • Grants • Strategic Business Alliances • University/College connections • PTSA Funding • Booster Club (Sports, Chorus, Drama) Funds • Community Support • Parent Involvement |

RECOMMENDATIONS

| Barriers to Equity | Background | Goal/Recommendation |
|--|---|---|
| <u>1. Disproportionate Educational Load</u> | See schools at a glance summaries. | More equally distribute educational load across the three schools and proportionally increase resources for schools with higher educational load. |
| <u>2. Facilities</u> | Concerns about the substantive differences facility quality as well as "curb appeal" have been present since before Blake opened. | Equal opportunities to participate in quality high school functions (e.g. school plays and sports). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve auditorium sound system at both PBHS and SBHS • Sports – program should be held harmless during condemned field repair, additional transportation costs and borrowed field fees and loss of booster club revenues for home games should be addressed by MCPS • Augment SBHS cafeteria facilities to allow for a single, mixed lunch period • SBHS Up to date TV studio |
| <u>3. Public Image</u> | | |
| Publicity (External) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consortium-wide media specialist to ensure highly visible coverage for all 3 high schools • Perform analysis of coverage over past 2 years in local press; hold meeting with editors to discuss. |

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|--|---|--|
| Discipline | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater consistency in disciplinary action (what is a suspending offense at one school may not be at another) at all 3 schools • Clear communication to the community by all 3 principals about similarities and differences in disciplinary approaches, including public acknowledgement that all 3 schools face that same behavior challenges present across our community |
| Publicity (internally produced) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrade SBHS website • Strengthen SBHS promotional materials |
| Transparency of Information Available to the Public | Access to clear information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start information process earlier – perhaps 6th grade spring semester. • Have all 3 schools presented at each NEC Open House • Explain the choice process in terms of intent, communicate race and SES composition of base areas • Make absolutely clear at the beginning of the annual choice process any “adjustments” to the process (e.g. reduced number of seats) and the possible impact on student assignment outcome. • Provide information on acceptance rates for previous years for each school by each category. |
| 4. Resources | | |
| Community Resources | Funding and other support from non-MCPS sources is critical to the successful programs that a school can offer. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare resources available to each school • PTSA and Booster Clubs Budget • Business and Corporate Partnerships • Higher Education Partnerships • Grants • Review opportunities for parent involvement at each of the NEC high schools. • Identify “best practices” at feed middle schools and NEC high schools |
| Parent Involvement | | |
| 5. Signature Programs | | |
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The presence of 3 equally compelling signature programs has been identified as a critical NEC success factor since the planning stages in the early 1990's. • SBHS Information Technology should be as well identified, successful and visible as Blake Drama or Paint Branch Science • Provide itemized cost of NEC program as a whole, including transportation and personnel • Clarify Signature Programs cost vs. benefit |
| 6. Counseling Departments | | |
| | Counseling resources need to be appropriate to the student population, accessible, and designed to encourage each student to meet his/her maximum potential. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage counselors to participate in a race/diversity study group (or MCPS Race, Equity and Achievement workshop for school personnel June 27, 28 or 29 with stipend available for teachers), with parents, teachers and students to increase their knowledge about student needs and perceptions • Reduce the number of students each counselor works with in order to allow counselors to be more proactive in meeting complex needs • Identify measurable means for ensuring cultural competence and adequate counselor resources • Collect data and monitor class placements by race/ethnicity vs. achievement measures |
| Conclusion | | |
| | This is a preliminary analysis, based on a beginning understanding of the situation and limited information available. We recommend forming a working team to initiate an on-going dialogue with 3 high school administrations, parent groups, and NEC Office to further define goals and actions needed. | |

MISPERCEPTIONS WORK TEAM

Team members: Malcolm, Mary, Rhonda, Anne, Cindy, Maggie, Sakura

Team Spokesperson: Malcom & Cindy

Team Liaison: Mary

Problem: Misperceptions of the schools and racial and ethnic stereotypes affect choice in the NEC.

These misperceptions are based on:

- Ignorance
- Stereotypes
- Racism

Some of the perceptions are:

- Perception that Black and Hispanic = "Ghetto"
- diversity = low performance
- minorities can't lead

(see chart on stereotypes on page 4 of notes)

Long-term Goal: To ensure that students are making choices for NEC high schools based on factual information and signature programs rather than misperceptions about schools

Short-term Goal: (by start of school): To create an NEC campaign to foster positive images/perceptions for each school—MCPS in coordination with PR person at each school

Action Steps:

MCPS should:

1. Ensure that all communication to media highlights the diversity of the schools.
2. Ensure that coverage in Gazette highlights all schools equally (determine if coverage to date has done this and if there are discrepancies meet with editor from Gazette to discuss).
3. Provide accurate information, to counteract misperceptions, to media outlets (i.e. Gazette, Washington Post, Out and About in the NEC and school list serves).
4. Establish a communication plan and strategy, designed to enhance the reputation of the NEC as a whole, including the positive emphasis on the importance of diversity. A key focus of this communication plan could be to encourage the diverse community media to provide balanced and fair information about the NEC community as a whole—highlighting the successes of the consortium as a whole and emphasizing the importance of maintaining the preferred choice process.
5. Establish a committee of representatives from the schools, MCPS and parents to provide guidance and input into this issue.
6. Develop an outreach strategy to get information into minority media outlets. i.e. Latino papers; Asian newspapers, etc.
7. Provide support to the designated media liaisons of the high schools.
8. Start in elementary schools to talk about the preferred choice process and the strengths of all of the high schools.
9. Involve parents in choice presentations to middle schools; ensure that parents represent the diversity of the NEC.
10. Ensure that school reps who present in middle schools mirror the diversity of the NEC.
11. Provide information on high schools to the middle schools and encourage them to broadcast the information throughout the year. Focus on accomplishments of high school students, ensuring that diverse student populations are represented.
12. Convene more study circles in the community (including diverse groups with parents, school reps and students) that are focused on the impact of race and ethnicity. Develop plan to convene study circles in Spanish for Spanish speaking high school and middle school parents.
13. Create a video of study circles about race and ethnicity and misperceptions that can spark discussions in schools and community.

Misperceptions Work Team (continued)

High Schools should:

1. Designate a staff member to provide information about their high school to the media outlets; coordinate development and release of press releases.
2. Ensure that their signatures are designed to attract a broad array of students, including non-academically oriented students---particularly important for Springbrook and Paint Branch.

Parent Groups should:

1. PTSA's and others in parent community should work to ensure that information is circulated about the successes at the high school they represent. Ensure that they work in collaboration with each of the staff liaisons to get information for the NEC Out & About and to provide accurate information, to counteract misperceptions, to media outlets (i.e. Gazette, Washington Post, Out and About in the NEC and school list serves).
2. Write letter to editor of Gazette about misperceptions of schools in NEC and the effect that these misperceptions have on the community.
3. NEC incorporate Study Circle suggestions in testimony and other advocacy efforts.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS WORK TEAM

Team members: Jemina, Marie, Tuwana, Michelle
Team Spokesperson: Jemina Cornejo

Team Liaison: Michelle Patterson

Barriers this strategy is addressing:

- Lack of knowledge of the available resources and how these resources can be utilized by everyone in school community
- Lack of parent involvement
- Lack of diversity and sensitivity training to adequately serve the diverse community and stakeholders
- Lack of leadership that will prioritize and ensure equality, access and success for all students

Long-term goal:

To maintain school's high vision for success for all students

Short-term goal(s):

What should be accomplished by the start of school?

- Ongoing training session on diversity issues for teachers/staff
- Parent liaison implemented at each school

What should be accomplished by the end of next school year?

- Develop a peer mediation program at each school
- Hire more counselors (academic/guidance)

Action Steps:

- Commitment that school administrators will set high expectations for all teachers and staff members
- Certify that teachers and staff will be trained to accept all students and treat them equal i.e. diversity/sensitivity training sessions
- Educate teachers about stereotypes affecting students
- Establish/re-establish volunteer parent liaison to link community groups to all parents
- Hire more counselors (academic)
- Schedule more class meetings. Let students know that staff and administrators are available to and for them in the school
- Implement peer mediation program at each school