


Office of the Superintendent of Schools
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

February 3, 2009

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jerry D. Weast, Superintendent of Schools 

Subject: Course-Related Fees Follow-Up

During the Board of Education's joint Policy and Fiscal Management committees meeting on January 9, 2009, about changes regarding course-related fees, a question was raised about the cost to eliminate all course-related fees and expenses. Although it is not possible to determine the exact cost, this memorandum explains the costs that the system would incur or activities and opportunities that might be discontinued if all fees and expenses were eliminated.

My January 7, 2009, memorandum describing the results of staff's review of fees charged for course-related items reflects the beginning of an ongoing process (Attachment). New guidelines will be implemented in Fiscal Year 2010 for both secondary and elementary schools. In addition, the fee waiver process has been improved to ensure that students whose families cannot afford the fees are not prevented from participating in any course. Based on the analysis contained in that memorandum, my recommended FY 2010 Operating Budget realigns \$1.5 million to support the implementation of the new guidelines.

The cost of eliminating all fees and expenses for students would be prohibitive. It could result in discontinuing certain programs and course offerings and might increase inequities between those schools with Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) that are able to raise significant amounts of funds to support school programs and those PTAs that are not able to do so. The following descriptions provide examples of the budget that would need to be put in place by Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) if all fees or expenses were eliminated. For the purpose of this memorandum, fees and expenses will be grouped into three categories—required course fees and expenses, non-required course fees and expenses, and other fees and expenses. It is important to remember that this is an initial review of the fees and expenses incurred by families. As we implement the new guidelines, we will continue to gather information that will allow us to complete a much more thorough analysis next year. However, since families purchase some of these items directly and do not purchase from the school, it will not be possible to determine the exact amount for some of the items.

Examples of Required Course Fees and Expenses

- As outlined in the January 7, 2009, memorandum, some course fees will be allowed. These include courses in which foods are consumed by the student as part of the course; materials become a product that belongs to the student; and personal items become the student's property, such as automobile technology uniforms. Staff's preliminary analysis indicates that the fees for these courses could be as much as \$1.4 million next year.
- Calculators are required for all mathematics courses beginning with algebra. The cost of purchasing graphing calculators for all students taking algebra (with the assumption that they would keep the calculator for all courses throughout their high school career) would be approximately \$1.1 million per year. In year one, an additional \$4.2 million will be required to purchase calculators for all the current high school students in courses beyond Algebra 1.
- Students who choose to participate in instrumental music require an instrument. Currently, MCPS supplies some instruments to students. However, most instruments are either privately purchased or rented from local music stores. The cost of building the inventory of musical instruments so that students do not incur this expense is approximately \$6.3 million for Grades K–12 (this includes repair of the instruments). After year one, the annual cost of replacement and repair is approximately \$1.3 million. The cost to replace all strings, reeds, bridges, and mouthpieces would cost about \$200,000 per year.

Examples of Non- Required Course Fees and Expenses

- Field Trips—Board of Education Policy IPD, *Travel Study Programs, Field Trips and Student Organization Trips*, states that the purpose of most field trips should be to support and/or enhance the curriculum. This policy also provides that no student will be penalized if he/she does not participate. As a result, schools offer alternative activities for those students who do not attend field trips. Nonetheless, if the cost of every curricular-related field trip was paid for by the school system, it would require several million dollars.
- Resources for studying—Resources such as a dictionary; writer's manual; atlas; or SAT prep, AP prep, or accounting workbooks are not required. However, these materials can be used by students as a study tool or support for homework. Schools often keep sets of these materials in classrooms, but do not purchase enough for students to use at home. The cost of these resources cannot be estimated, as we have no way of knowing how many students have made such purchases in the past. This is one reason why using previous expenditures through the schools' independent activity funds do not provide accurate information for the estimated potential cost.

- Numerous courses including show choir, chorus, and instrumental music have associated performances. Students in performance groups may be asked to dress in similar attire; e.g. black pants and white shirt, black dress, etc. This expense is incurred by families. Sometimes uniforms or costumes are required for performances. In these cases, either students purchase uniforms, school groups raise funds to purchase uniforms, or PTAs provide financial support for the purchase. Because these uniforms are not a required part of the curriculum, MCPS does not fund the purchase. If schools could no longer expect families to purchase these outfits for performances, MCPS would have to purchase them, PTAs would have to raise money to cover the cost, or the schools could no longer require these performance groups to wear similar outfits.

Examples of Other Fees and Expenses

- MCPS Grade 6 students are provided the opportunity to attend Outdoor Education. The fee for Outdoor Education is \$76 per student, for a total cost of approximate \$800,000.
- Many schools ask students to purchase agenda books or personal planners to use as an organizational tool. The average cost of these books is \$4.50. If MCPS covered the cost of planners for all secondary students, the cost would be approximately \$315,000.
- Schools may identify individual organizational tools and personal writing supplies for students to bring from home. Examples of these items are shown in the new guidelines. It is not possible to estimate the cost of these items.
- Students who choose to participate in extracurricular activities pay an activity fee. This is a per-student fee. Extracurricular activity fees total approximately \$800,000 per year.
- Numerous extracurricular activities have associated expenses. Examples include shoes, socks, mouth guards, and shin guards.
- Students who drive to school pay a parking fee. Last year, schools collected approximately \$300,000 in parking fees.
- Extracurricular activities such as marching band, chess club, and math club sometime include optional travel to competitions. Travel to these competitions requires funding for transportation, hotel, food, and registration.
- Outside organizations such as the College Board and the Educational Testing Service require students to pay for testing services. If every student who takes the SAT took it just once, the cost would be approximately \$300,000 annually. MCPS students pay approximately \$2 million in administrative fees annually for Advanced Placement Tests.

Even if MCPS assumed all of these expenses and fees, students would still have the option to purchase materials, instruments, and equipment rather than use those supplied by the school system. In addition, it is important to remember that MCPS provides financial assistance through the waiver process to students in need. Further, schools and PTAs will continue to have the option to raise funds in order to supplement the costs associated with fees and expenses.

The Superintendent's Recommended FY 2010 Operating Budget realigns \$1.5 million to offset some fees based on the new guidelines. If the Board of Education considers the option of eliminating all fees and expenses, the cost to operate existing programs and courses would be several times greater, based on the analysis above. The examples described in this memorandum generate costs of more than \$17 million dollars in year one. I do not believe this is reasonable and do not recommend this action. Furthermore, I believe many programs will be compromised and eliminated over time.

Staff will continue to review information throughout the remainder of this year and in FY 2010 as we implement the new guidelines. As new information becomes available, changes to the guidelines may occur. The Board's Policy and Fiscal Management committees will receive updates throughout the next school year.

If you have any questions, please contact Mr. Larry A. Bowers, chief operating officer, at 301-279-3626.

JDW:vnb

Attachment

Copy to:
Executive Staff