

**Einstein Cluster Comments to the County Council
on the Proposed FY 2008 Operating Budget
April 16, 2007**

Good evening and thank you for allowing the Einstein Cluster to comment on the budget. My name is Alies Muskin and along with Kay Romero, we serve as the Einstein cluster coordinators.

I would like to give you a very quick overview of the cluster. Einstein is one of five clusters that comprise the Downcounty Consortium, which represents 20 percent of the students attending MCPS. Within the Einstein cluster, all schools are majority minority, and among the four elementary schools as many as 72 percent of the students at one school qualify for free and reduced meals.

Demographically, the ESOL population has grown to more than 40 percent of all students over the last four years. The percentage of students with Asian and Hispanic backgrounds has increased significantly in that same time period. While the percentage of Special Education students has remained about the same over four years in the middle school it has increased at the high school 5 percent to 18 percent this year. About 10 percent of Einstein's 1750 students have attended MCPS schools for less than two years. And about 60 percent of Einstein graduates report continuing their education at two or four year institutions.

Academically, elementary students have benefited from all day kindergarten, small class size initiatives and aggressive math and reading programs. Somewhere between the focus on elementary school and arriving at high school, things changed. The middle school years have failed to firmly plant a core value that academic achievement is cool. It is not possible to ensure success for every student if the middle years do not offer support to students who did not grasp basic concepts and provide challenges to those who are ready. Middle school reform is critical to the success of the future.

At the high school level, students have many choices. Einstein has four academies including an International Baccalaureate program, and the countywide Visual Arts Center. Academic support is available to students who excel in advanced placement courses or need to master reading on grade level and everything in between. Supporting these programs is expensive. Ensuring that students who come through MCPS are ready to access the academic challenges presented in high school is essential. Creating a teaching and administrative bench that can provide continuity is critical as programs flourish across the County.

And while these programs offer among the best that education can provide, our County faces significant challenges moving forward. Again focusing on Einstein, an average 30 percent, or roughly 550 students, have less than a 2.0 GPA. These include students who take IB, AP, Honors and regular courses. The majority of these students are male, and either Hispanic or African American. What does the future hold for a student with less than a 2.0 GPA?

Many students lose credit for classes in high school because they simply do not attend. Attendance, or lack of it, is a recurring problem at Einstein. What are the initiatives to address this problem? Schools need help to reach an increasingly diverse, non-English speaking parent population. Outreach coordinators with fluency in multiple languages are needed to work with parents whose children are not in ESOL to help bridge the cultural gaps.

These demographics will shape the outcomes of programs delivered in the future. Every action taken, every decision made, every program started or stopped has an impact on the future of a child. Initiatives are started and fade away, without visible assessment of their effectiveness or failures. There are many issues that are not addressed in the budget or discussed openly including gangs, teen pregnancy, suicide, multicultural outreach, after school initiatives and much more. As budget discussions continue, look at how decisions will affect laying a solid foundation for the future and whether the choices made acknowledge demographic trends and identified needs to support all students.

Einstein Cluster Overview

Schools include

Albert Einstein High School
Newport Mill Middle School
Sligo Middle School
Highland Elementary School
Oakland Terrace Elementary School
Rock View Elementary School
Woodlin Elementary School

March 2007

7 schools, 5,237 students
Average* FARMS – 40.8%
Range FARMS – 22.9 – 72.5%
Average* ESOL – 21.9%
Average* Mobility – 18.8%
Middle School SPED – 11.4-17%
High School SPED – 18%

March 2003

8 schools, 6,224 students
Average* FARMS – 43.5%
Range FARMS - 24.8 – 64.3%
Average* ESOL – 16.2%
Average* Mobility – 20.6%
Middle School SPED – 11.3-17%
High School SPED – 13.7%

** Based on elementary school populations*