

February 12, 2007

Nancy Navarro, President
Board of Education
Montgomery County Public Schools
850 Hungerford Drive
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear President Navarro:

The MCCPTA Board of Directors discussed the recent actions of the school board and the superintendent regarding graduation venues on February 7, 2007, and approved a three part motion. The MCCPTA Board of Directors: endorses MCPS funding of graduation venue costs; believes that MCPS, with parent input, should develop criteria to guide venue selection and the apportionment of costs between MCPS and local high schools; and will advocate for reduced rental fees for the Comcast Center with the Maryland State legislature and urges MCPS to do the same.

The MCCPTA Board of Directors is in favor of MCPS paying for graduation venue costs. We feel that this is the most equitable solution for all high schools as there is disparity in communities' ability to raise funds for graduation expenses. Some members do have concerns that money can be found for this use while other educational priorities go unfunded. This gives rise to our concern with regard to future graduations and the opportunities schools will have in choosing graduation sites. We strongly encourage that parents, including MCCPTA, be involved in establishing criteria for graduation venue requirements for future years.

Dr. Weast's FY 2008 Operating Budget Amendment and Adoption memo leaves our members with several questions and concerns regarding future graduation venues. The memo states "...full funding for graduation ceremonies for schools that continue to use DAR Constitution Hall or any other venue approved for graduation ceremonies." What are these approved venues? Does this include City of Jericho? What happens if a school below the 500 graduate mark wishes to graduate at Comcast Center? Is there parental involvement in deciding graduation venue for each school?

The memo also states an assumption that four high schools will be eligible for future use of Comcast Center. According to Schools at a Glance, there are seven high schools next year with graduating classes of over 500 graduates. In 2009, it is projected that eleven schools would meet this criteria. What are the budget implications of funding these schools' graduation at Comcast Center?

We also urge MCPS to become involved in the discussions regarding the design and construction of an upcounty arena which would be suitable for MCSP graduations. The County Council is involved in a feasibility study for an arena for the Maryland

Nighthawks team which currently play at Montgomery College. Our Board believes that MCPS should be involved in these discussions even at this preliminary stage to ensure that such a facility could accommodate future graduations.

We are aware that other counties have been able to negotiate more favorable rates at the Comcast Center and the Patriot Center for their graduations. We urge the Board of Education to explore whether there is any possibility of waiving or reducing rental fees as the rate of \$34,000 cited for FY2008 would appear to be higher than that paid by other school systems.

It is unclear whether the Board of Education intends to take action on February 13, 2007, to establish a set of graduation venue selection criteria. If so, we ask that any action on this issue be tabled until such time as the community and MCCPTA have had the opportunity to provide input on graduation venue criteria and long term solutions. There are many unanswered questions and we ask for the opportunity to explore all solutions with you before a decision is made.

Thank you.

Sincerely,