



MCCPTA Testimony before the Board of Education on The Superintendent's Recommended FY 2008 Operating Budget January 10, 2007

Good Evening President Navarro, Dr. Weast, and members of the Board of Education. My name is Jane de Winter; I serve as President of the Montgomery County Council of PTAs and represent parents and teachers in 199 schools across the county. On behalf of all MCCPTA members I would like to thank the BOE for this opportunity to testify before you this evening on the Superintendent's Recommended FY 2008 Operating Budget.

This budget makes significant progress towards MCCPTA priorities as outlined in our FY 2008 Operating Budget Compact and Resolution on FY 2008 Operating Budget Priorities which are attached. MCCPTA focused on seven operating budget priorities this year and I am going to briefly relate the progress this budget proposal makes on them.

There are several new items that should address our goal of **increasing secondary literacy**. These include the middle school Literacy Coaches and expansion of reading interventions. A number of the middle school report recommendations may help **close the achievement gap**. Some of these are the expanded middle school extended learning opportunities, the study skills program, Achievement Via Individual Determination (AVID), and the Honors and Advanced Placement Identification Tool (HAPIT).

MCCPTA strongly endorses 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 modest increase in funding for middle school activity buses is a welcome addition. Adding 10 new middle schools clearly addresses our priority to **expand the Special Education Hours based Staffing Model**. We support funding this model in all schools.

It is extremely disappointing that this budget provides no new funding to **increase the number of Parent Community Outreach Coordinators**. MCCPTA has advocated for school based bilingual staff dedicated to parent outreach for several years. It is difficult for us to continue to hear central office staff say that they don't see the value in this position.

We also find this budget makes no progress towards our goal of **safe, secure, clean, healthy, modern school facilities**. Indeed the inclusion of increased funding to keep up with the increase in emergency repairs only points out the dire consequences of failing to keep pace with necessary repairs. MCPS must address the enormous backlog of maintenance projects which we have been told currently stands at \$40-50 million.

Several items in this budget may **improve the curriculum roll out process** but there are some cuts in curriculum writing stipends that may prove counterproductive. Some positive steps are the addition of middle school content specialists, curriculum supervisors to develop math, reading, and writing assessments, benchmarks, and technology tools, and the decision to finally develop an explicit sequence of GT curriculum in the current curriculum guides.

So while this budget makes significant progress toward some of our priorities, and there are items I have not mentioned that address other goals outlined in our operating budget compact, there are deficiencies and concerns. Discussions with our clusters regarding the budget identified three themes which seem to summarize our concerns regarding the Recommended FY 2008 budget.

Are we really **meeting every student's needs**? While we understand the difference between services and programs within the context of an IEP, we are troubled that realignments and systemic changes in program delivery rather than an IEP review may determine changes in the services a child may receive. The consolidation of the GT/LD program leaves many

parents wondering why this program is under enrolled when so many have sought to have their child enrolled in this program.

As you know there is a great deal of concern regarding the realignments contained within the Department of Special Education Services. In April, 2005, MCCPTA passed a resolution resolving that MCPS should provide a full continuum of services and placement choices with a full range of options as well as provide more and various alternatives in the LRE placement for those students who will not otherwise be able to derive educational benefit from a LRE placement.

To the extent that the proposed phase-out of the Secondary Learning Centers narrows the continuum of services available and restricts the choices available to special education students, MCCPTA is unable to support these realignments. Suggestions have been made for a phasing plan based on a choice model. Indeed, many parents might voluntarily return their child to their home school if MCPS can offer an appropriate range of services in that setting.

We add our concern that these changes not be viewed a success solely based on whether they raise the number of schools making AYP, but only if they lead to increases in individual students' achievement.

Other concerns regarding these realignments lead us to encourage you to **plan before you land**. Parents remain convinced that general education secondary teachers will need additional training to support the return of secondary learning center students to their home schools and there is no provision for this in the budget, in fact the Office of Organization Development has over \$1 million in unspecified cuts. Recurrent failure to keep up with the rate of inflation in textbook costs and repeated surpluses in the textbook budget lead us to ask how can our literacy efforts succeed when so many courses, especially at the elementary level, don't even use a textbook. Parents want their students to have books. As you continue to develop the operational details of High School Plus we urge you to make sure there are good options for students from all our high schools.

And finally we ask, is MCPS truly interested in **two way communication**? Many of the parent/community engagement pieces will truly enhance MCPS's ability to communicate to parents. Expanding principal's ability to send translated information home is a positive step. There may be some value in a parent academy. The expansion of Ed line is provides parents with information to support their child's learning. However, all of these changes speak to one-way communication—that is MCPS giving information to parents. But where and how are you expanding your capacity to listen to parents who speak other languages and to fully embrace parents as partners in every school in the county? Parents frequently find themselves the sole parent representative on School Improvement Plan review committees, advisory committees, and workgroups. The decision making process involved in the special education realignments does not speak to a true partnership.

And finally, we find that MCPS has taken a great leap backwards in providing information that allows decision makers and the community to assess the costs and benefits of particular programs and initiatives. There is conflicting information regarding the staffing realignments within the budget book and we are still waiting to see the full details on the realignment of \$1.6 million to support Middle School reform. MCCPTA looks forward to another opportunity to comment on the budget when this information becomes available.

Again, we thank you for this opportunity to testify tonight and for the time and consideration you provide to our clusters to bring their kudos and concerns to you. MCCPTA looks forward to standing by your side as we work to secure the funding our children need to succeed and thrive in Montgomery County.

Attachments:

MCCPTA FY2008 Operating Budget Compact
MCCPTA Resolution on FY 2008 Operating Budget Priorities
MCCPTA Special Education Resolution