



The Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations

MCCPTA Comments to the Board of Education on Policy IEB: *Middle School Education and the Middle School Reform Report* January 9, 2007

Good morning President Navarro, Dr. Weast, and members of the Board. My name is Jane de Winter; I serve as President of the Montgomery County Council of PTAs.

MCCPTA members have been eagerly awaiting the Report on Middle School Reform as they are anxious to see changes in Middle Schools across the county. This is evidenced by the large number of public comments the Board received on Policy IEB, the vast majority of which asked you to delay action. This is an extensive report that should be given due consideration by the Board and by parents and other stakeholders.

We realize that it is not the usual practice to take comments on reports to the Board. However, this is an unusual case as this report is the culmination of an extensive, lengthy effort, which will produce fundamental and far-reaching changes in middle schools. MCPS did hold two sets of forums throughout this process. The first group of forums were very well run and provided many opportunities for input regarding what parents and other stakeholders viewed as the problems of middle schools. The most recent sessions to present information about Middle School Reform were less satisfactory and produced a great many questions from parents which have yet to be answered.

This is a long, detailed report, which we are attempting to digest while we are simultaneously trying to analyze an almost two billion dollar budget. We see that many of the recommendations support MCCPTA priorities as identified in our Operating Budget Compact and Resolutions, but we have questions and concerns as well. We also cannot fully comment on the \$1.6 million of proposed realignments until we also have information regarding the sources of the realigned funds. Unless we know what we are giving up, we cannot determine if the money will be meeting a higher priority.

We are pleased to see some of our comments on Policy IEB incorporated into the policy and look forward to hearing further changes being proposed at the table today. However, we would like an opportunity to bring forward further comments on IEB once we have analyzed the Report on Middle School Reform in greater detail. MCCPTA would like to be a vital and involved partner in Middle School Reform. We do not think moving ahead before all stakeholders, including Board members, have had adequate time to evaluate the Report enhances our partnership.

We ask that you delay action on these two items until both the Board and the public have had ample time to comment on the Report and then reevaluate Policy IEB in light of the information contained in the report. Thank you.

The following is provided as one example of how this Report would have affected MCCPTA comments on Policy IEB.

Goal 6, “engage parents and the community as partners to promote school and student success” involves seven recommendations to accomplish three things, one of which is to ensure regular two-way communication. These seven recommendations seem to center around either one-way communication—MCPS providing information to parents, or two-way communication between teachers and parents regarding individual students. We would like to see a specific recommendation centered on involving parents in the decision making process of the school beyond the reference to the National Standards for Parent/Family involvement. Such a recommendation might involve specific guidelines for expanded and valued parent participation in SIP teams—a concern of many parents and local PTA leaders across the county. Policy IEB does offer the following “This partnership will benefit from the following...Opportunities for parents to provide input, feedback, and involvement in decision making regarding the academic, social, and co-curricular programs.” However, this language does not require schools to offer these opportunities. Given that none of the seven recommendations offers specifics as to how parents would be partners in decision-making, we would likely have recommended changes in the policy language to require such opportunities be available in every middle school.

The January 23, 2007, Delegate Assembly will feature a program on Middle School Reform presented by Ms Linda Ferrell. MCCPTA would like the opportunity to bring additional comments on the report and policy to the Board of Education following this presentation.