



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
MARYLAND

www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org

August 21, 2008

Ms. Kay Romero, President
Montgomery County Council
of Parent-Teacher Associations, Inc.
2096 Gaither Road, Suite 204
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Ms. Romero:

I enjoyed speaking with you regarding the concerns of the Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations pertaining to graduation venues. You expressed unease over the timing of the June 20, 2008, memorandum to high school principals clarifying the information used to begin the planning for the June 2009 commencement ceremonies and determining the process for identifying dates and venues of commencement ceremonies for the 2008-2009 school year.

As we discussed, schools select where to hold their graduation ceremonies based on the size of the graduating senior class and stakeholder input. High schools select venues for their graduation ceremonies based on the input from their stakeholders and the capacity and cost of the venue. The four high schools with the largest graduating classes are given the opportunity to choose Comcast Center as a possible graduation venue, with the understanding that additional costs for the use of the Comcast Center will have to be paid for by the individual school.

As stated in the June 20, 2008, memorandum distributed to principals, they "are expected to use their established stakeholder feedback processes" to determine the commencement ceremony venues for their schools. Principals had approximately six weeks from receipt of the memorandum until the deadline of July 31, 2008, to notify the Office of School Performance as to their desired graduation venue. There are a number of communication tools that schools have available to gather feedback from stakeholders during the summer months. These include mailings, communication through the school website and e-mails, ConnectEd messages, focus groups, and other communication methods.

Collecting stakeholder input and selecting graduation ceremony venues during the spring or fall presents difficulties due to the timing of receiving the final approval of the Montgomery County Public Schools upcoming school year budget and the need to reserve venues in a timely manner. Budget amounts that are available to support high school graduations are not finalized until after the budget for that fiscal year is approved by the Montgomery County Council, generally toward the end of May. Additionally, schools need to complete their current senior graduation ceremony before they begin working to ascertain the venue for their upcoming senior class.

Ms. Kay Romero

2

August 21, 2008

These venues capable of accommodating commencement ceremonies must be reserved many months in advance to ensure that we secure our desired dates. If the graduation venue decision-making process was begun in the fall once students have returned to school, there is the very real possibility that the preferred dates would not be available. Therefore, schools must make their decision as to the venue of their individual graduation ceremonies during the summer.

Thank you for your continued support of the Montgomery County Public Schools. Please feel free to contact me at 301-517-8258 if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,



Stephen L. Bedford
Chief School Performance Officer

SLB:dm

Copy to:

Dr. Weast

Mr. Bowers

Dr. Lacey

Community Superintendents

Mr. Ikheola

Ms. St. Pierre