

January 21, 2009
Operating Budget Testimony
Einstein Cluster

Good Evening. My name is Kelly Giblin. I am the Cluster Coordinator here to bring the voice of the Einstein Cluster to you.

The Einstein Cluster recognizes that the Board and MCPS are facing truly challenging economic times. I am here tonight not to offer a list of things that should stay in the budget or things that should go. Rather I am here to provide a picture of what is going on in our cluster and ask for your thoughtful consideration when making difficult choices that will affect children.

The Einstein Cluster has many things to celebrate. From measurable gains in MSAs to our own Highland ES being named a Blue Ribbon school. According to the MCPS website, Instructional leadership positions, including a reading specialist, reading coach, and math content coach, are used judiciously to ensure that the needs of individual students are being met. The results are nothing short of phenomenal. At the middle school level, the number of children successfully completing Algebra and Geometry continues to rise. Newport Mill Middle School was named a National School of Character. Einstein HS was named to the top 1000 schools on Newsweek's Challenge index.

But there are children in the cluster who are not thriving. The cluster middle and high schools continue to have among the lowest scores in the County on some measures. The recent MCPS report of AP pass rates showed a decrease in these rates for Einstein students. The overall pass rate is 20 points lower at Einstein than the average MCPS rate. While student enrollment is clearly high enough to qualify as a top school, there is disconnect when slightly more than 50 percent of students are passing these exams and demonstrating readiness for college. More than 30 percent of the rising 9th graders, approximately 100 students, arrived at Einstein this past August at risk according to MCPS. These students spent one or more years in MCPS schools. At the end of the second marking period, more than 50 percent of all ninth grade students had less than a 2.0 GPA. Where did we lose them? The numbers of high school students reading below grade level is alarming, though this is not unique to Einstein. There are more than 60 seniors or about 20 percent of the senior class who have not yet passed their high school assessments. One-third or more of the 1,500 students at Einstein are academically ineligible - a percentage that has not changed in more than five years. Meaningful interventions are needed to realize sustained, measurable results.

One such successful intervention happened as the result of a partnership between the Einstein Administration, the Athletic Department and the Booster Club. Focusing on athletes (about 300 students this Fall season) school staff was dedicated to carefully

overseeing athletes' grades and progress through Edline. Building relationships with students, having frequent conversations, and offers of help resulted in a huge drop in the number of athletes who became ineligible. This past Fall roughly 95 percent of Fall athletes remained eligible and were able to participate in a winter sport if they chose to. Of the 17 Fall teams, 10 kept their whole team eligible. What's more, over 40 percent of our fall athletes made the honor roll. Building relationships in a smaller community made the difference for many of these student athletes.

We continue to see the ESOL population grow. More children are coming to school with behavioral health issues than ever before. And while keeping class sizes small is a laudable goal, it is often what happens outside the classroom that makes a difference. It won't matter if a child is in a room with 10 kids or 30 kids if they are struggling with the pressure of gangs, or violence, has not eaten or needs additional assistance for a learning disability. Other students can't catch up because they do not have fundamental literacy skills, or won't continue on to college because they are frozen with the fear of a daunting process.

Many programs have been implemented throughout the County over the past few years. Which ones are worth keeping, supporting and nurturing? What measure will you use to decide what brings the greatest benefit to students? The Einstein Cluster is here tonight to ask that you carefully scrutinize the programs and the budget. Look at items marked to stay and those marked to go and ask why were they put in place? What were we hoping the outcome would be? Was the outcome achieved and how have we measured success? Are positive measures sustainable? Is there another way to get the same or better outcomes? Then, and only then, should choices be made as to what we can afford to cut.

Thank you,

Kelly Giblin

Einstein Cluster Coordinator