

THE NORTHEAST CONSORTIUM
A Consortium of the Blake, Paint Branch and Springbrook Clusters

Comments on the FY 2010 Operating Budget

On behalf of The NEC High Schools

January 14, 2009

Blake High School
Paint Branch High School
Springbrook High School

Good evening Superintendent Weast, Mrs. Brandman, and members of the Board. My name is Patti Twigg and I am the Paint Branch Cluster Coordinator. I am here tonight to speak on behalf of the Operating Budget needs of the three high schools in our Consortium — Blake, Paint Branch and Springbrook. Let me begin by saying that the Northeast Consortium strongly supports the MCCPTA FY 2010 Operating Budget Compact and Resolution on Operating Budget Priorities.

Let me give you a brief snapshot of the high schools of the Northeast Consortium. According to Schools at a Glance, 2008 edition, our Ever FARMS rates vary from 36.5 to 56.2%. Our mobility rates vary from 13.2 to 15.5%. Students that receive special education services vary from 8.2 to 8.7% of the total school population. Students that receive ESOL services vary from 0.6 to 5.9% of the total school population.

We have organized this testimony to follow the MCCPTA Resolution on FY 2010 Operating Budget Priorities.

1. Current or improved teacher/student ratios at all schools

We are happy to see that we are in accord with the Superintendent and Board of Education over the minimization of budgetary impacts on class size. However, we are concerned that other planned staffing reductions will have seriously negative consequences.

With the phasing out of the Secondary Learning Centers, we are concerned about staffing for the inclusion classes that are replacing them. We wish the solution were as simple as just adding another adult in a classroom, but of course, life is never

simple. Paraeducators are hard working, caring individuals, but they do not have the same level of training as special education teachers. Last year in my testimony I mentioned that I was anxiously awaiting the reports from the Learning Center Transition Evaluation Advisory Group and the Secondary Learning Center Transition Project Management Team. According to my sources, those reports are still not available. How can we know that staffing is adequate to support our students without hard data to support that belief?

Reductions in alternative teachers will put remaining staff under extreme duress. The students they work with are among the most vulnerable, and the Operating Budget in Brief acknowledges that this may lead to reduced services to students who need support. What will happen to these students? Will they fall through the cracks? Frankly, we think that more alternative programs are needed for high school students, not fewer.

When will hours based staffing reach our high schools? Our high school students have fewer years left in MCPS, and thus fewer years for us to impact their education, prepare them for the High School Assessments, and prepare them for the next steps after high school. Can we really afford to wait? When can we expect the data assessing the hours-based staffing initiative's usefulness? In tight budgetary times, it is imperative to evaluate programs for their effectiveness.

We would like to see the allowance of flexibility for principals to make choices regarding staffing to best accommodate the needs of their school. While we don't know details, we hope this can be maintained.

2. Safe, secure, well-maintained, healthy, school facilities

Building maintenance is one of the priorities for our clusters. Aging facilities need constant maintenance to ensure they are safe for our students and staff, as well as the community members that use our schools 7 days a week.

I know I do not need to reiterate the concerns mentioned in the past regarding Paint Branch High School. But what does bear repeating is that as our buildings age, we can certainly expect these types of problems to keep cropping up, with greater frequency. We feel that preventative maintenance of our schools is the most cost effective solution. Therefore, when we see cuts in maintenance and plant operations staff, we become very concerned.

School security is also important on our large high school campuses. Maintaining appropriate levels of security staff is critical to the safety of our children.

3. Sensible, developmentally appropriate, fully supported curriculum implementation

All of our Northeast Consortium high schools have special classes and programs that do not always have maximum enrollment. Staffing cuts will significantly hamper these programs and abolish some higher level classes which are important in attracting students and families to each school during the Choice process.

4. School-based community outreach

Springbrook HS is proud to have an active Latino parents group, "PALA" - *Padres y Alumnos Latinos en Accion* - that the Board of Education is familiar with, as you awarded it the "Distinguished Service Award" in October 2008. This award was given in recognition of PALA's efforts to increase Latino families' participation in the school, making connections with staff and other parents, and finding resources to help students be successful. MCPS must find the resources to support these vital connections between home and school that research has proven are critical to student achievement. Parent Community Coordinators are a proven link in this chain.

5. Tailored support, especially for those who are performing below grade level, and enrichment programs for all students

We are all painfully aware of the need for our current seniors to pass the HSAs to receive diplomas. Our high schools are working in overdrive to make sure every child has a chance to succeed. And, yet, high school literacy coaches are being cut. I have been told this will only exacerbate existing reading problems in our high schools. To test well, a student must read well. It is just the kind of ripple effect that can be disastrous.

Staff Development Teachers are another critical link in the chain of student support so necessary for success. These teachers are responsible for shaping instruction to make it more effective through training teachers in the use of best practices.

With the additional responsibility of implementing HSA Bridge Projects, Resource Teachers in those content areas are already feeling the strain of finding time to support students who need help. Doing more with less may be a popular catch phrase, but even teachers have a breaking point where burn out occurs.

Cuts in the Class One stipends will have an impact on our extra-curricular activities. The staff that runs after school clubs put in more hours than they are paid as it is,

because they love the students and the activities, but with less money to fund these clubs, students may have fewer options. We all know there is a clear correlation between how connected a youth feels to their school and their achievement in class.

School today is very different than when I was a child, or as my children refer to it, the Mesozoic Era. But, I have spent the last 18 years volunteering in school buildings. I have ranged from the classroom, to the main office, to the guidance office, and have learned a lot about the inner, daily workings of our schools. I have come to appreciate just how hard the staff works to educate and care for our children, and I certainly salute them. If I were queen of the world, I would require every citizen of Montgomery County to spend a day volunteering in our schools – working in the trenches, so to speak. Only then would they truly understand the tremendous value they are getting for their education dollars!

In closing, we believe that our partnership with you, the County Council and the State Government, in working for the best for all our students, families and staff, shows a strong commitment to our common goals. As I said earlier, we all realize that the budget is very tight this year and that difficult choices must be made. We appreciate your careful and thoughtful consideration of our concerns.

Respectfully,

The Northeast Consortium Cluster Coordinators

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