

Northeast Consortium Middle School Testimony to the Board of Education January 14, 2009, for the 2010 Operating Budget

Northeast Consortium Middle Schools

My task today is to represent the voices of the middle schools in the Northeast Consortium. I am a parent with three children attending schools here in Montgomery County. Two of my children are in high school. They are probably the lucky ones. The youngest is in the second grade. I am fighting for him and his contemporaries. I am a tax payer and I am a voter. I vote in every primary election and every general election. I believe our schools are the best in the United States. This has been echoed by recent rankings and articles published in the Baltimore Sun. I will quote two of them.

Maryland schools rank 1st in nation in analysis by 'Education Week'

By Liz Bowie

January 7, 2009

Maryland's schools rank first in the nation in an analysis of factors such as high school graduation rates, student achievement, academic standards and accountability done by *Education Week*, a publication based in Bethesda.

Maryland, ranked third last year, edged out Massachusetts by one-tenth of 1 percent. Both states were given a B grade overall, but the national average was a C. Maryland scored well on the standards for early childhood education and preparing students for college.

The report is likely to be widely quoted in the next year by state officials, particularly Gov. Martin O'Malley and Superintendent Nancy S. Grasmick. **They have noted previous reports as evidence that Maryland has been moving in the right direction by providing more than \$1.3 billion annually in funding over the past several years as well as requiring high-stakes testing at the high school level.**

Report: Money to Md. schools helped improve test scores

By Liz Bowie | liz.bowie@baltsun.com

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Five years after Maryland increased spending by \$2 billion to provide greater academic equity, students have made remarkable gains in reading and math, according to a report given to the Maryland General Assembly Wednesday by an outside consultant.

For every additional \$1,000 spent per student, there was a significant increase in pass rates in both subjects. The improvement was twice as great for middle school students compared with those in elementary grades.

With the proposed cuts in the operating budget, I believe we are walking down an avoidable path of reversing the successes that we have achieved over the past 5 years. You/We need to push back and say no to the unilateral budget cuts being proposed to our operating budget. I believe that you cut \$100,000 here and you loose a child in the process.

For our middle schools there are three areas that we absolutely need to keep in tact: *Middle School Reform; Current Designated Class Sizes, and our Maintenance and Custodial Budgets.*

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Middle School Reform

We are in the middle of our three-year Middle School Reform process. In order to ensure that we are being responsible to our children, it is imperative that you continue to fund the Middle School Reform program in its entirety. I will take a few moments to summarize the work that must continue.

Goal 1: Effective leadership that promotes shared ownership for student and staff success and establishes a culture of high expectations.

- Implement a comprehensive **professional development plan for middle school leaders**
- Establish a new **internships for aspiring middle school principals** to develop leadership skills specific to middle school
- Restructure the roles and responsibilities of resource teachers and team leaders
- **Add new mathematics and literacy content specialist positions at the schools**

Goal 2: Engage all students in effective and differentiated instructional practices using a rigorous, standards-based curriculum and challenging assessments.

- Align mathematics and English curricula with The College Board standards and use formative and benchmark assessments
- Identify explicit accelerated pathways within the middle school curriculum areas
- Implement a comprehensive **professional development plan for middle school instructional staff on topics such as differentiation, rigor, technology, and using data to drive instruction**
- Offer **rigorous electives** in the arts and technology using the courses from the Middle School Magnet Consortium as a model
- **Utilize innovative classroom technology** in selected content area classes to actively engage students in instruction

Goal 3: Provide extended learning opportunities that engage and motivate students to achieve at higher levels.

- Redesign after school and summer programs and **incorporate the use of innovative technology and hands-on activities** that actively engage students

Goal 4: Implement organizational structures that maximize time for teaching and learning, cultivate positive relationships, and promote increased student achievement.

- Provide **hours-based staffing allocation to support the inclusion of special education students** in general education classes
- **Increase counselor allocation** to support student success
- **Allocate an additional 75 hours per week to schools for professional development and collaborative planning**
- Establish system wide criteria for selecting a school schedule
- Implement the Honors/Advanced Placement Potential Identification Tool (HAPIT) to increase enrollment of African American and Hispanic students in advanced level classes

Goal 5: Ensure that middle school staff has the knowledge, skill, and content expertise to meet the learning and developmental needs of middle school students.

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- **Recruit, hire, and retain staff for middle schools who are highly skilled** in meeting the needs of middle school students and who reflect the diversity of the MCPS community
- **Train all staff members who hire middle school personnel** to match potential candidates to the needs of middle school students

Goal 6: Engage parents and the community as partners to promote school and student success.

- Implement the Study Circles program to build staff-parent-student relationships and develop action plans for addressing racial and ethnic barriers
- Develop a tool kit for school staff that includes resources, best practices, and strategies for effective two-way communication and parent and community engagement
- Create a Parent Academy in collaboration with parents and community partners to help parents access school and community resources and enhance skills to support student learning

Class Size Reduction and Decrease in Experienced Teaching Positions

There seems to be a trend in the operating budget to eliminate teaching positions being held by experienced staff and replacing the experienced staff with less experienced educational positions. There are many resources positions being eliminated, i.e. literacy positions, signature coordinators, supervisors, and classroom teachers to name a few. In some cases these positions are not being replaced. In other cases the replacements are with less experienced staff. We are concerned that the cuts could bring about 1 or 2 possible results. Larger class sizes due to the reduction in staff, or less quality education due to the replacement of seasoned staff with less experienced staff.

Maintenance and Custodial

The NEC believes that now is not the time for the Reduction of Building Services Workers and cleaning supplies. Just last year we had a nationwide outbreak of **Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA)**. We learned that cleaning and a decrease in personal contact assists in the mitigation of a MRSA outbreak in schools.

I would also like to state that during tough times we must ensure that our schools are well maintained. With declining funding for capital projects, it is more important today, that our cleaning and maintenance of school facilities does not decrease. Our concern is with the elimination of 17.5 positions in the Division of School Plant Operations, including 5.0 elementary building service worker positions, 7.0 secondary school building service worker positions, 4.5 central office building service worker positions, and 1.0 special schools building service worker position, and the reduction in building services supplies.