

## **The Northeast Consortium**

A CONSORTIUM OF THE BLAKE, PAINT BRANCH AND SPRINGBROOK CLUSTER SCHOOLS

### **Testimony to the Montgomery County Council Regarding**

#### **The MCPS FY2009 Recommended Operating Budget**

Elementary Schools: Broad Acres, Burnt Mills, Burtonsville, Cannon Road, Cloverly, Cresthaven, Dr. Chas. Drew, Fairland, Galway, Greencastle, Jackson Road, Roscoe Nix, Wm. T. Page, Sherwood, Stonegate and Westover

April 7, 2008

Good evening President Knapp, Council members. I am Lee Ann Doerflinger, one of the Blake Cluster Coordinators, and I am here tonight to represent the sixteen elementary schools of the Northeast Consortium which is made up of the Blake, Paint Branch and Springbrook clusters.

The elementary schools of the NE Consortium have an unusually diverse population. According to the most recent Schools at a Glance, nine of these schools have FARMS rates above 40% with the overall range between 9.9% and 88.6%. ESOL rates range between 3.7% all the way up to 51.7%. Numbers do not tell the whole story however. Parents in all of our schools have concerns in common, and we have heard them over and over again at our monthly consortium meetings.

Our number one priority is class size. It has been suggested that adopting the County Executive's proposed budget may lead to the loss of approximately 400 teaching positions throughout the county and, consequently, an increase in class size. We have all worked very hard to reduce class size over many years and our students have reaped the benefit of improved academic performance. Larger classes would be a giant step back from the progress we have made and the consequences would be with us for years to come. The foundation for all our children's future education is laid in the early grades when they learn basic skills of reading and mathematics. Cloverly and Stonegate are already struggling with the consequences of over enrollment and letters from both schools describing their difficulties are attached to the written testimony.

A second, related concern is staff development, particularly with regard to mathematics. As younger students are being encouraged to take Math A, appropriate training for their teachers is absolutely imperative. In addition, Stonegate has asked for a full-time math content coach which would have the secondary effect of reducing math class sizes in its primary grades, where some advanced level classes have ballooned to over 30 students. Teaching even basic math concepts to a class of 32 six year olds is extremely difficult!

ESOL staffing, additional counselors and special education staffing have also been raised as concerns. Galway, which has nearly 700 students and is projected to grow even larger next year, is hoping for at least a .5 counselor to be added in the 2008-2009 school year. Inclusion of special education students in general education classrooms requires sufficient staff and ongoing evaluation of the success of the inclusion approach. ESOL staffing in many of our schools is obviously also a priority since 13 of

the 16 schools have ESOL populations that comprise over 10% of the student population and six of those schools have ESOL populations of over 20%.

A recurrent theme has been a wish for more lunch and recess aides and also a wish that those aides receive more training in behavior management since bullying on the playground remains a problem. Having enough aides to supervise recess activity is also a safety issue.

Finally, we would like to see the *Survey of School Environment* restored to being an annual event. It is disappointing that the survey was dropped this year as a money-saving measure. We feel that it provides valuable information about school climate and needs to be done annually.

Thank you for giving us this opportunity to present our priorities.

Respectfully,

The Northeast Consortium Cluster Coordinators

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