

The Northeast Consortium
A CONSORTIUM OF THE BLAKE, PAINT BRANCH AND SPRINGBROOK
HIGH SCHOOL CLUSTER SCHOOLS

Testimony to the Montgomery County Council
Regarding the FY2010 Recommended Operating Budget
April 16, 2009

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

Good Evening President Andrews and members of the County Council. My name is Dawn Dolan, Blake Cluster Coordinator along with Lee Ann Doerflinger (who was unable to be here tonight) representing the interests of the sixteen (16) elementary schools within the Northeast Consortium.

Our schools maintain an outstanding level of academic achievement and program expectations. Our children are privilege to some of the finest and most dedicated educators. It is *our* greatest responsibility to ensure *no less than this* for our children's future—as well as our own. This is especially true in today's economy. We can ill-afford nor with good conscience, short a generation that must be equipped to understand, participate, and contribute to a complex world around them.

These NEC schools are indicative of the changing character of our County and of the challenges this presents. The richness of our diversity is as stunning as our geographic boundaries. While we have some of the most highly performing schools, these same schools represent the 4th highest FARMS, 3rd highest mobility and 6th highest ESOL rates (according to the 2008 Schools at a Glance) within MCPS.

We are rife with special programs. 11 of our elementaries', 147 classrooms total are part of [within] the Reduced Class Size Initiative (CSR). We now have 4 Linkages to Learning, including School-Based Health Centers (SBHC); and there are 39 separate classes of Special Ed programming, 10 classes of pre-k/Head Start, and 2 classes of METS.¹ Additionally, Drew houses a Gifted & Talented Center and Burnt Mills features a Spanish Immersion program.

We are grateful that the MCPS budget will receive support through the designation of both Federal stimulus and State monies. There is concern though that these funds will create a false sense of relief and our efforts in preserving class size or appropriate instructional support will suffer. The reduction of essential staff such as Math Content and Reading Specialists, Special Ed and ESOL teachers, as well as Staff Development (amongst many others!) will cause further distress to our schools and a detriment to our community.

It is equally perplexing and alarming to imagine the absorption of these personnel in a highly tasked and demanding educational system. As a parent volunteer and a substitute teacher, I am constantly amazed by the mechanics, skill and team efforts that are needed to create a successful day for each student – and then there's the paperwork, communications, community interactions, and yes, lots of volunteer time.

¹ Multidisciplinary Educational and Support - for non-English speaking students with limited educational experience

Our schools afford more than just academics — tending to the physical and emotional well-being of students. While MCPS incorporates these priorities into its strategic planning, it relies on resources from other County agencies.

The effects of reductions to these will be critical to our schools' needs for crossing guards and EFO's, health room personnel, and services to school-based wellness centers. Moreover, the cuts in the George B. Thomas Saturday School will affect our youngest students.

We are aware of the forfeits that need to be made in this year's budget. The dilemma is that our children are not products or infrastructure. We can fill a hole, replace a beam, and buy more paper. What we CANNOT do is replace a year, a day or even a minute of a child's life once it is gone.

We can talk about compensating and readjusting for the gaps our children may face as a result of the current climate, yet are already unable to fully supplement the students who find themselves in this situation today, never mind a future increase in these numbers. Ergo, we are trying to appreciate the County's goal in requesting a waiver of the MOE² effort, but it is with some apprehension. Requesting a cost per student reduction as the cost of everything else (fuel, materials, utilities, etc.) is increasing while further decreasing the school budget is understandably disconcerting. While we also know that the BOE has consented to support this move with specific conditions, it brings to mind a particular quote, "The best laid plans of mice and men. . ." —exemplified by the State required transparency ruling that will incur up to \$50,000 of unplanned expense in the school's budget.

Thank you for hearing this testimony on behalf of the NEC. We are proud of and grateful for the dedication our County has steadfastly given our schools.

Respectfully,
The Northeast Consortium Cluster Coordinators

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² Maintenance of Local Effort