

# **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

April 16, 2009

Blake High School  
Paint Branch High School  
Springbrook High School

Good evening President Andrews and members of the Montgomery County Council. My name is Patti Twigg and I am the Paint Branch Cluster Coordinator. I am here tonight to speak on behalf 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.

The high schools of the Northeast Consortium recognize that this will be a difficult budget year. We are willing to do our share to shoulder the burden of this economy. We are very appreciative of school and county government employees that went without their COLA increases. We are very appreciative of Mr. Leggett's recommended budget and support of the budget request from MCPS. However, we feel it is also important to focus on the fact that we are talking about children, not numbers. Meeting the ever-increasing needs of our students is our primary goal, and adequate staffing is key.

We are all painfully aware of the need for our current seniors to pass the HSAs to receive diplomas. Crunch time is here. Our high schools are working in overdrive to make sure every child has a chance to succeed. Adequate staffing in our classrooms and beyond is critical to this endeavor. And, while MCPS is committed to maintaining class size, we are extremely concerned about cuts in administrative staff and high school literacy coaches.

Literacy coaches may seem like a luxury, but they play a vital role in making sure all students are able to access all parts of the curriculum to be successful in high school and beyond. To test well, a student must read well. Many 9th grade students enter high school reading significantly below grade level. The cut of the literacy coach positions is a huge mistake given the literacy needs of our students. We will no longer have anyone working exclusively to test and monitor the progress of

our students. We will lose someone to direct the coordinated effort to ensure all teachers teach literacy throughout the curriculum. It is just the kind of ripple effect that can be disastrous.

It is also critical to have enough administrators to allow our teachers to focus on instruction and not just deal with discipline and management issues. Our high schools of 1800 to 1900 students are really like small towns, and need adequate administrative support to function smoothly and serve the needs of all students.

With the phasing out of the Secondary Learning Centers, we are also concerned about inadequate 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. Inclusion classes need class size reductions as well as additional staffing.

Parent Community Coordinators are very important to our schools. Parent involvement in the education process is a demonstrated factor in student success, and reaching out to parents in normally underserved demographic groups is vital to the success of our most vulnerable students in high school and beyond.

The maintenance of our aging buildings continues to be a major concern for us, especially considering the proposed cuts to the maintenance budget. I have become a broken record, but the next 4 schools on the high school modernization schedule, led by Paint Branch, continue to keep their respective maintenance depots very busy. And as has been pointed out repeatedly, as our schools continue to age, we can certainly expect major system failures to keep cropping up, and with greater frequency. We feel that better preventative maintenance of our schools is the only cost effective solution to this issue, and wonder how it can be accomplished by reducing staff and funds for maintenance?

Beyond MCPS's budget, we are extremely dismayed to see cuts in the funding for the academic supports for the sports academies at Paint Branch and Springbrook high schools. In addition, the cuts to the Sharp Suspension program and George B. Thomas Saturday School funding will impact the achievement of some of our most vulnerable students. Please don't let them down! We also are strongly supportive of the continuing need for funding school EFOs and school health room personnel.

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, MCPS 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 and support you in your efforts to close the budget gap.

Respectfully,

The Northeast Consortium Cluster Coordinators

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