

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

Comments on the FY 2012 Operating Budget

On behalf of The NEC High Schools

January 12, 2011

Blake High School
Paint Branch High School
Springbrook High School

Good evening Superintendent Weast, Mr. Barclay, members of the Board and staff. My name is Jocelyn Walker and I am the Blake 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 2012 Operating Budget Compact and Resolution on Operating Budget Priorities.

Our community understands the dire economic times we face, and that difficult choices are necessary. We truly appreciate all the hard work and careful consideration that goes into creating a budget in times such as these. We also appreciate the balanced approach taken last year when cuts were made. And, we appreciate your allowing us to provide input into this deliberative process.

The clearest message we are receiving from our community is that they think it is important to minimize the impact of any possible budget cuts on the daily operations in our schools. Staff that work directly with our children every day are, they feel, the linchpin of our school system. Staff in our schools; teachers, administrators, counselors, security, secretaries, signature coordinators, media specialists, paraeducators, building service workers and more, all make enormous contributions to the success or failure of our students. This is not to say others in the school system do not have a significant impact, but our community feels that staff in the schools should be our top priority in lean times.

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

The State graduation requirement in the form of the HSAs has added to the workload of our school's staff. Our high schools are in overdrive to make sure every child has a chance to succeed. And, yet, academic intervention teachers, who work with struggling students, have been cut in the past. Supporting these students is more important than ever, and part of making sure we have an educated populace, which is vital to our economy.

With the additional responsibility of implementing HSA Bridge Projects, Resource Teachers in those content areas are feeling the strain of finding time to support students who need help. Doing more with less seems to be today's catchphrase, until you observe the added stress and potentially resultant burnout.

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.

Building maintenance is a priority for our clusters. Our schools, which are not only sites of education, but also serve a myriad of other functions, 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. We feel that preventative maintenance of our schools is the most cost effective solution. The maintenance staff works very hard, but it is our understanding that work orders are backlogged due to staff shortages.

Before I close, I want to leave you with an image of one of our high schools in the afternoon and early morning. As you know, high schools start classes at 7:25 am. At Paint Branch HS, and no doubt others, students start arriving before 7 am, and wait patiently for entry to the media center. The reason for this? So that they can use the computers to print out their homework. Many do not have computers at home. The school computers, and access to them, is critical to their academic success. We ask that you keep this image of our students, our priority, in mind when deciding where future cuts will be made in the operating budget.

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 do not envy you this task. We do appreciate your careful and thoughtful consideration of our concerns.

Respectfully,

The Northeast Consortium Cluster Coordinators

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