

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 Middle Schools

Benjamin Banneker
Briggs Chaney
William H. Farquhar
Francis Scott Key
White Oak

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Good evening Superintendent Weast, Mr. Barclay and members of the Board. I am Reva Gambrell, Springbrook Cluster Coordinator, and I am here this evening to speak on behalf of the five middle schools of the Northeast Consortium: Briggs Chaney, White Oak, Francis Scott Key, Benjamin Banneker, and William Farquhar which we share with the Sherwood cluster.

We recognize that we face another very difficult budget year. Even while facing this fact, we believe that we must continue to maintain the standards of excellence for which MCPS is rightly known and our children deserve. The NEC advocates for a balanced and thoughtful review process, careful to avoid cuts to programs that are hallmarks of the Montgomery County Public Schools. These are programs that our parents expect and our children deserve when they matriculate through our system.

The NEC supports MCCPTA's Resolution on FY 2012 Operating Budget Priorities and the Operating Budget Compact which speaks to the MCCPTA's highest budget priority – education.

MCCPTA operating budget priorities are:

- No reductions in maintenance, building service, or security staff to maintain safe, secure, and healthful schools.
- Judicious curriculum rollout; no new curriculum without adequate staff development, materials, and technology.
- No further increase in class sizes,
- Full implementation of hours-based staffing for special education students,
- Continued support for after school activities,
- No reductions in academic intervention, focus, reading, ESOL, or special program teachers.

Recognizing the continued sluggish growth in local tax revenues paired with a rapid growth in student enrollment we know that there will be tough decisions. The NEC urges that as tough funding decisions are made, the Board of Education focus on protecting the items listed as priorities in the MCCPTA Operating Budget Priorities Resolution.

As middle school students are beginning to make choices about classes that will follow them into high school -- for instance in math and foreign languages -- it is important that counselors have the time to help individual students make those choices carefully. It is also important to view the long-term impact to a cohort of students. As students start down a curriculum path where a reduction or change is made, will that change negatively impact that cohort of students -- will they be able to complete what they started? We must make choices that minimize this type of scenario.

Our Resolution on Operating Budget Priorities asks that class sizes be kept as low as possible to better ensure the classroom dynamic is as effective as possible. Other points in the resolution regarding staffing could also be affected. Special education students and those who need extra assistance for any reason are vulnerable: they need adequate staffing to ensure that they are able to learn to the fullest extent of their abilities. And students who are gifted academically need the enrichment that makes their education suited to their abilities as well.

We are also concerned about the maintenance of the school buildings, building services and security staff. Continuing, ongoing maintenance is the key factor in keeping our buildings clean and safe. Fixing things as they break is an inefficient method of keeping buildings in working order. Adequate staffing of maintenance depots is imperative. Building services staff do a wonderful job taking care of the schools under their care, but some things are beyond their scope and we need to recognize that fact and give them the support they need.

I leave you with a very specific example of a student's reaction to the thought of a program reduction. I asked my daughter, a seventh grader at Briggs Chaney Middle School, how she felt about Outdoor Ed possibly not being offered next year. Her response "No!, not Outdoor Ed!"

This response is from a student who has already had the opportunity to participate in the rich educational experience of Outdoor Ed and wants the same opportunity for the next 6th grader. **For our children, we must preserve the rich experiences, the priceless memories and the "game changing" educational opportunities and curriculums offered in our Montgomery County Schools.**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the NEC middle school community.

Respectfully,

The Northeast Consortium Cluster Coordinators

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