

THE NORTHEAST CONSORTIUM

A Consortium of the Blake, Paint Branch, and Springbrook Clusters

Comments on the FY 2013 Operating Budget

On behalf of The NEC Elementary Schools

January 11, 2012

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

Good evening Superintendent Starr, President Brandman, and members of the Board. I am Princess Akwura-Igwebuike, one of the Paint Branch Cluster Coordinators, and I am here to speak on behalf of the 16 elementary schools of the Northeast Consortium.

We would like to express our support for the MCCPTA Operating Budget Compact and Resolution on Operating Budget Priorities. We equally support the Superintendent's Budget Request. We appreciate the weight of the decisions being made here and are grateful for your diligent efforts. Our Consortium of schools represents the diverse academic and cultural spectrum within MCPS. Our schools have some of the highest FARMS/ESOL rates in the County while equally producing some of the highest achievement results. They provide successful gifted and special education programming.

The reductions and realignments last year affected our schools dramatically. We strongly support Dr. Starr's desire to not impact students any further by maintaining school staffing at the levels from last year, plus additions for increased enrollment, but we must note that last year's numbers were a reduction, and our students have already been impacted.

Classrooms must be appropriately staffed. Teachers *are* the *cornerstone* of the entire academic process, without them education simply doesn't exist. Focus teachers, reading initiative teachers, reading teachers and paraeducators play a vital role in meeting the needs of our children to learn the skills they must acquire in order to achieve at high levels in middle and high school.

Staff development is essential to ensure that our teachers remain able to provide exceptional instruction, as well as developmental nurturing for our children. Lowering our expectations is not the answer. A regressive process is not the path to success. We must uphold the dignity of our schools.

Cresthaven/Nix ES PTA expresses the concerns of our Consortium very clearly: “Our main concern with the budget has to do with staffing. Specifically, the projected increase in student enrollment is a concern. Currently at all grade levels our classes are at capacity. What is the outlook for additional staffing to reduce the large class sizes, especially for a Title I school?” While we appreciate Dr. Starr’s intention to not reduce school staffing, the fact is that we have already seen reductions, and we are seeing the impact of these reductions.

They continue: “The other concern is transportation. We have several buses that are overcrowded and this creates a safety concern for our students. What, if anything is being discussed and/or suggested to relieve the overcrowding situation, i.e. more buses, etc.” We have noted a suggested reduction in positions in transportation. We consider this a health and safety issue, and would like to see more buses to prevent our students from having to stand on the buses.

In addition, the PTA is concerned about the need for the staff to have professional development for learning and implementing MCPS Curriculum 2.0. The school system has made it harder because they decreased staff development days a few years ago and this has impacted the ability to schedule times for team work. This is especially true in our school where teams consist of 8-10 teachers per grade level. Staff development time during the day provides them with an opportunity to meet with entire grade level teams and include the support staff working with those teams (ex. Reading specialist, ESOL teachers, resource teachers). In addition, instructional funds need to reflect the materials needed to implement the new curriculum. This year we received 3-5 sets of materials for each grade level, and once again, sharing these among 8-10 teachers on a grade level has been a challenge. Staff development time and an increase in instructional funds are two areas that need funding.”

Sherwood ES and Galway ES PTAs have been steadfast in support of needing more hours for their counselors. Sherwood would like to see their counselor restored to full time, and Galway, as one of the largest elementary schools in the county, would like to see equity in the allocation of counselors based on enrollment, not grade level! This affects all students, parents, and staff.

Classrooms exist as “mini-societies,” and schools must operate like functional family systems to support our children at every level. A wholesome and safe environment is critical to this and more reductions in maintenance staff would be deleterious.

Our school system considers achievement to be essential and recognizes the importance of considering the whole-child. Your exceptional commitment, in partnership with staff and community has made our school system one of the most effective in the country. Our mutual goal is to ensure that this continues into the future. We thank you for your continued work on behalf of all our children, and look forward to continuing to work with you!

Thank you.

Respectfully,

The Northeast Consortium Cluster Coordinators

Area Vice President – **Patti Twigg**

Springbrook Cluster – **Reva Gambrell**

Paint Branch Cluster – **Princess Akwura-Igwebuike and Larry Edmonds**

Blake Cluster – **Jocelyn Walker**