

Memorandum for: Members of the Board of Education  
Superintendent Joshua P. Starr

From: The Parent Leadership Group

Date: April 17, 2012

Subject: Parent Leadership Group Outcomes: Parent Engagement and Continued Need for Cultural/Ethnic Understanding and Access

Through a year-long process which examined perceptions and experiences of multiple ethnic/cultural groups, parent representatives identified concerns that persist within the Montgomery County Public Schools and which hinder parent engagement. These parent representatives have formed the Parent Leadership Group. As ideas and conclusions evolved over several months, the Parent Leadership Group formulated several strategies to engage all parents. Foremost, the Parent Leadership Group concluded that all ethnic/cultural parent groups must exist on their own but be provided with direct opportunities to share experiences and to generate best practices for inclusiveness. Further, each parent group is the most effective in identifying the obstacles to student learning, achievement and parent engagement. This should never be overlooked by those striving to tear down ethnic/cultural barriers to student achievement.

The emerging Parent Leadership Group (PLG) has incredible potential both in advocacy and in student support to eliminate the achievement gap. The Board of Education and the Superintendent are encouraged to implement a formal process wherein the Parent Leadership Group meets regularly with MCPS leadership to identify additional issues and differentiated solutions for improving parent engagement and student achievement among all ethnic/cultural groups. The members of the Parent Leadership Group are committed to an ongoing dialog that will foster a positive shift in accountability, expectations, and outcomes for all of our students.

**Background:** In March 2011, sixteen parent leaders representing various cultural and ethnic identities within Montgomery County came together to participate in a six-week Study Circle Program. The program, facilitated by the Department of Family and Community Partnerships, assists participants in addressing racial and ethnic barriers to student achievement and parent involvement. Participants came away from this experience not only with a much greater understanding of barriers to successful educational experiences, but also a greater desire to advocate for all children. Following the conclusion of the Study Circle program, and with the outstanding support of DFCEP, this group of parents - now named the Parent Leadership Group - have continued to meet and openly discuss how parents, students, schools, and the Board of Education may come together to improve the educational experience for all children throughout Montgomery County. Out of these meetings, the PLG developed an initial set of action items/recommendations for consideration that may beneficially effect change.

**Recommended Actions to Increase Parent Engagement and Student Achievement:**

Numerous studies have shown that increased parental involvement and engagement correlate with greater student achievement. In turn, schools will always need parent volunteers to support community-building activities, to provide additional resources for students/school/staff, and to provide guidance on best practices for communicating and engaging parents within that specific school

community. Both engaged and involved parents from all ethnic/cultural groups are integral to a successful school system. As such, the PLG has identified an initial set of actions aimed at increasing parent engagement and student achievement:

- Foremost, implement a formal process wherein various parent ethnic/cultural groups and MCPS leadership meet regularly to identify issues and generate solutions to improve student achievement. It is the hope of the PLG that the Superintendent and Board recognize the imperative nature of this engagement and indicate full support.
- Establish the expectation that all MCPS schools will host study circles.
- Ensure a true partnership between parents from diverse backgrounds, school administration and MCPS leadership by:
  - Including parents earlier in process and policy reviews. Request input of parental ideas, not simply feedback on previously devised questionnaires.
  - Develop culturally-sensitive information for parents on how to access school leadership
  - Continue to support established as well as emerging ethnic/cultural parent groups through access to the Back to School Fair, language translation services, MCPS TV “*Diez Minutos*”, multiple language flyers, etc.
  - Expand on timely language- and culturally- sensitive communications to parents on specific, comprehensible student performance data along with specific supports parents can provide to their child out of school.
  - Expand the provision of materials to parents on college readiness to include requirements of community colleges and universities, stressing early and regularly the goal for each child and the pathway towards achieving that goal.
- Develop metrics to measure parent involvement so that successful strategies that engage parents and increase student achievement can be reliably identified.
- Expand on a more focused cultural belief training for all MCPS teachers and staff.
- Implement teacher surveys specifically on cultural beliefs to identify current perceptions and pinpoint areas to address with priority action. Publish general results and specific actions to indicate the importance and imperative nature with which this is being addressed within our school system.
- Implement ethnic/cultural-specific surveys for student and parents regarding their experiences and perceptions. Development of such surveys will further inform best practices for engaging all parents.
- Continue to inform and request parental input regarding MCPS suspension/discipline policy and provide staff training (school leadership, counselors, and teachers) on managing discipline issues to avoid escalation.
- Ensure appropriate support to and participation of students of all ethnic/cultural groups in all major MCPS programs (ESOL, Special Education, Arts/Humanities, Enrichment/Magnet programs, athletics, arts and science, etc) such that program enrollment is not race-predictive.

### **Current PLG Representative Organizations:**

**Montgomery County Council of PTAs (MCCPTA):** The Montgomery County Council of PTAs is a member organization established in all Montgomery County elementary, middle, and high schools. Yearly membership countywide typically averages around 50,000. A county-level governance structure exists with eight elected officers, Area Vice Presidents and Cluster Coordinators (in alignment with the MCPS structure), and 23 committees. At the local school level, PTAs vary in strength and goals, again depending on their community. Local PTA membership data is shared with the MCPS Office of School Support and Improvement. In an effort to direct more resources and focused support to the diverse

parent populations, MCCPTA recently established a Multicultural Awareness Committee to collaborate with the already existing MCCPTA Parent Involvement and ESOL Committees. Additional discussions are underway to enhance the collaboration between the MCCPTA ESOL Committee and the ESOL Board Advisory Committee (EBAC). Contact: Kristin Tribble, President

**NAACP/Education Committee Parents' Council:** The Parents' Council of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) developed as an outgrowth of ideas put forth during the 1995 and 1996 NAACP Youth Summits as a vehicle to empower African American and other minority parents to take a more pro-active role in the education of their children. The Parents' Council is comprised of parents and guardians of minority children enrolled in MCPS and others who share the goal of equal education for all children. Members of the Parent Council are appointed by Principals from each school in Montgomery County and work together within the county's schools for the purpose of training other parents to be advocates for their children, sharing information and resolving problems that impact the education of their children, and are often either a liaison or a board member of the school's PTA. The Parents Council meets monthly on a Saturday morning to provide their council representatives with informational forums designed to support their mission and provide resources. Contact: Byron Johns, Chair, Parents Council

**Asian American Parent Advocacy Council (AAPAC):** The Asian American Parent Advocacy Council (AAPAC) mission is to support and speak on behalf of Asian American children and youth. AAPAC assists Asian American parents in developing advocacy skills and encourages Asian American parents to be more involved in their schools. AAPAC also fosters linkages between the Asian American community and the larger community, inclusive of all groups of diverse backgrounds. Contact: Bowen Fong

**Latino/Hispanic Parent Groups:** The Latino/Hispanic parents groups are still emerging with several established in schools throughout the county. Several individuals from this Parent Leadership Group are conducting intensive outreach efforts to these emerging groups in order to organize some type of countywide structure within which to collaborate, share knowledge, and strengthen each other. Contact: Antonio Hernandez-Cardoso, Chair, MCCPTA Multicultural Awareness Committee