

The Northeast Consortium
A CONSORTIUM OF THE BLAKE, PAINT BRANCH AND SPRINGBROOK
HIGH SCHOOL CLUSTER SCHOOLS



January 13, 2010

Testimony Regarding the MCPS FY2011 Recommended Operating Budget

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

Good evening Superintendent Weast, President O’Neill, and members of the Board. My name is Dawn Dolan and I am here to speak on behalf of the 16 elementary schools of the Northeast Consortium. We would like to express our commitment to the MCCPTA Operating Budget Compact and Resolution on Operating Budget Priorities. We equally support the Superintendent’s Maintenance of Effort Budget Request. We appreciate the weight of the decisions being made here and are grateful for your conscientious efforts.

Our Consortia of schools represent 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 objectives. They have successful special and gifted programming, as well as a strong commitment base for special education. The potential reductions and realignments indicated in the FY11 budget could affect our schools dramatically — our fear of amputation to our staff and programs is keen.

We whole-heartedly seek to preserve the reduced class size objective, one child more per class—**on the surface**—seems a reasonable compromise. However class size is currently inconsistent, making the proposition of further reducing school-based staff — classroom teachers, intervention and special program staff — very uncomfortable.

In the online version of the *Complete Recommended FY 2011 Operating Budget*, under the heading, “Budget Chapters, Chapter 1: K-12 Instruction: Elementary Schools,” clear strategies and performance measures have been described in accordance with the MCPS Strategic Initiatives. These objectives include rigorous benchmarks for: 1. meeting MSA AYP; 2. 2nd Grade TerraNova; 3. 5th Grade Math A & B; and 4. Reading Benchmarks, Grades K, 1, & 2. Viewed as a whole, there is clear pattern of success and progress and the recommended expectations have been raised in most of these areas. MSA and Reading Levels indicate an improved narrowing in the achievement gap among subgroups.

However, the text states (under MSA, p. 1-5) “disparities in performance remain between students who receive special services and those who do not.” Additionally, the wording under TerraNova is highly confusing and the Math A & B target has decreased from a goal of 50% for 2010 to 45% for 2011. In 2009, 48.8% of 5th Graders completed a middle school Math A or B. This is concerning.

Classrooms must be appropriately staffed. Teachers *are* the *cornerstone* of the entire academic process, without them school education simply doesn't exist. Focus teachers, reading initiative, reading teachers and paraeducators play a vital role in meeting the needs of our children and in the skills they must acquire to achieve in middle and high school. Staff development is essential to ensure that our teachers remain able to provide premium instruction, as well as developmental nurturing for our children. Lowering our expectations, as in Math A & B, is not the answer. A regressive or retroactive process is not the path to success.

Stonegate PTA has presented the Consortia-wide concern succinctly:

Stonegate ES parents and staff are most concerned about the possible loss of critical staffing. SES currently enrolls 463 students, 32 students more than initially projected for the 2009-2010 school year. Our three 2nd grade classes have 25 students in each, our 3rd grades are overwhelmed with 29 students, and our 5th grades house 27. We have already suffered a reduction in our media assistant position, our staff development substitutes (eliminated), and our reading initiative position over the last year. Such reductions have made it difficult to maximize our reading and language arts instruction and to effectively address our school improvement goals, particularly in the areas of reading and writing. For example, our 2nd grade reading classes, with the current level of reading initiative support, are still at 19 and 20 students (and should be at 17). Further, with only 11 hours of paraeducator support allocated to our school, providing intervention support for our struggling readers and mathematicians has been a challenge. Likewise, it becomes more difficult to meet the acceleration needs of our students and the performance target goals of our county.

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 are deleterious. Equally, the realignments *from* Food & Nutrition Services are unclear.

Many of the proposed realignments appear questionable, being unaware of the reasoning behind them. For example, the otherwise positive prospect of gaining funds for instrumental music at the cost to our middle schools in counselor positions. Similar examples appear throughout the Proposed FY11 Operating Budget.

Our education system reflects an achievement and "whole-child" oriented structure. Our exceptional commitment has made our school system one of the most effective in the country. Our mutual goal is to ensure that it maintains this on behalf of all our futures. Thank you.

Respectfully,

The Northeast Consortium Cluster Coordinators

Area Vice President - **Patti Twigg**
Springbrook - **Dawn Dolan**

Paint Branch - **Patti Twigg**
Blake - **LeeAnn Doerflinger**