

THE NORTHEAST CONSORTIUM

A Consortium of the Blake, Paint Branch and Springbrook Clusters

Comments on the FY 2011 Operating Budget

On behalf of the NEC Middle Schools

Briggs Chaney Middle School

White Oak Middle School

Francis Scott Key Middle School

William Farquhar Middle School

Benjamin Banneker Middle School

January 13, 2010

Good evening Superintendent Weast, Mrs. O'Neill and members of the Board. I am Lee Ann Doerflinger, Blake 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 this is a very difficult budget year. Nonetheless, we believe that we can continue to maintain the standards of excellence for which MCPS is rightly known. MCCPTA's Resolution on FY 2011 Operating Budget Priorities and the Operating Budget Compact focus in part on keeping staff positions which directly affect all students, as well as maintaining a safe, clean environment for learning, and maintaining communication between home and school. For middle schools particularly, however, there is a great need for "empirically based, developmentally appropriate, fully supported curriculum implementation": unfortunately budgeting difficulties seem to be slowing the implementation of middle school curriculum reform. It is important to our students that this curriculum continue to roll out as quickly as possible.

Given that money will continue to be short for several years to come, middle school parents in our consortium have expressed concern about proposed cuts which would result in MCPS losing as many as 240 classroom teachers, 24 academic intervention teachers, 13 special program teachers and 18 PPWs, counselors and psychologists. Once these positions are lost, it will be

very hard to rebuild those classes and programs in the future. Counselors and psychologists evaluate and place students in appropriate classrooms and environments and can be tremendously helpful in helping students to identify pathways to success. 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: reducing the number of counselors will make it far more difficult for them to do this.

Parents of middle schoolers are also concerned about the future of transportation in the Northeast Consortium. Given the wide area covered by the NEC, from Broad Acres Elementary inside the Beltway to Sherwood Elementary on Route 108, it is imperative that buses cover all of the neighborhoods in order to assure equal access for all to each of the three high schools. Blake particularly is underserved by public transportation and without school buses, students from the more distant areas would be much less likely to choose Blake. We are grateful that for the time being transportation is going to be preserved and we ask that it remain a very high priority in the future.

It is particularly distressing that we may be allowing class sizes to grow again after a decade of hard work to reduce class sizes, a strategy that has helped countless students. Again, our Resolution on Operating Budget Priorities asks that class sizes be kept as low as possible to keep the education going on in those classrooms 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 and portable classrooms. Continuing, ongoing maintenance is the important factor in keeping those structures clean, mold-free 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.

In this year of very difficult budget decisions, we ask you to preserve these programs and people. Thank you.

The Northeast Consortium Cluster Coordinators

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