

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 High Schools

April 5, 2010

Blake High School
Paint Branch High School
Springbrook High School

Good evening President Floreen and members of the Council. My name is Patti Twigg and I am the Paint Branch Cluster Coordinator. I am here tonight to speak on behalf of the Operating Budget needs of the three high schools in our Consortium — Blake, Paint Branch and Springbrook. Let me begin by saying that the Northeast Consortium strongly supports the MCCPTA FY 2011 Operating Budget Compact and Resolution on Operating Budget Priorities. We also support Dr. Weast's Maintenance of Effort level budget request. We feel that fully funding the MCPS budget request is critical.

Our community understands the dire economic times we face, and that difficult choices are necessary. We truly appreciate all the hard work and careful consideration that goes into creating a budget in times such as these. We also appreciate your allowing us to provide input into this deliberative process.

What exactly is in danger if the budget is cut further?

The clearest message we are receiving from our community is that they think it is important to minimize the impact of any possible budget cuts on the daily operations in our schools. Staff that work directly with our children every day are, they feel, the linchpin of our school system. Staff in our schools; teachers, administrators, counselors, security, secretaries, signature coordinators, media specialists, paraeducators, building service workers and more, all make enormous contributions to the success or failure of our students. This is not to say others in the school system do not have a significant impact, but our community feels that staff in the schools should be our top priority in lean times.

We are extremely concerned that possible staffing reductions will have seriously negative consequences. Equitable staffing among our high schools is a concern, since it was just this past summer that Paint Branch finally got a 4th assistant principal which brought them in line with the other two high schools in the consortium. Considering they have the largest student body of the three schools, this staff member was long needed.

School security is important on our large high school campuses. Maintaining appropriate levels of security staff is critical to the safety of our children, our staff, our buildings. EFOs are another important part of safety and security in our schools, although we realize this falls under the police department budget and not the MCPS budget. It was just one year ago that a tragedy was averted at one of our high schools because of the EFO and his relationship with the students.

The State graduation requirement in the form of the HSAs has added to the workload of our school's staff. Our high schools are in overdrive to make sure every child has a chance to succeed. And, yet, academic intervention teachers, who work with struggling students, are among the list of possible cuts. Supporting these students is more important than ever, and part of making sure we have an educated populace which is vital to our economy.

With the additional responsibility of implementing HSA Bridge Projects, Resource Teachers in those content areas are feeling the strain of finding time to support students who need help. Doing more with less seems to be today's catchphrase, until you observe the added stress and potentially resultant burnout.

Staff Development Teachers are another critical link in the chain of student support so necessary for success. These teachers are responsible for shaping instruction to make it more effective through training teachers in the use of best practices.

Building maintenance is another priority for our clusters. Our schools, which are not only sites of education, but also serve a myriad of other functions, need constant maintenance to ensure they are safe for our students and staff, as well as the community members that use our schools 7 days a week. We feel that preventative maintenance of our schools is the most cost effective solution. The maintenance staff works very hard, but it is our understanding that work orders are backlogged due to staff shortages.

As part of any budget reduction process, we would like to emphasize our support for gathering information on what works and what doesn't. It is clear that otherwise we are operating in a vacuum and making decisions in the dark. In particular, a piece of information we would like to see is a study of exactly how our teachers and administrators are spending their time every day. Is the commonly held belief that teachers and administrators are burning out due to the heavy burden of paperwork and other non-teaching tasks, substantiated by the facts? We feel that such studies would provide the kind of information that would be of assistance when deciding where cuts are most effective.

I volunteer once a week at Paint Branch. I mention this to validate my next statement – I am continually impressed by how hard the staff works. Sadly, I think many parents, and for that matter, most residents of Montgomery County, do not have a clue about the daily operations in our schools! School staff earns every penny they get, and then some. People that think teaching is an easy job have never spent time in a modern classroom. I want to thank and commend all staff members in our schools!

We also would like to see data on the effectiveness of high school plus as compared to the program it replaced. Is it working? Are our students benefiting from it, or was night school more successful? And, alternative programs for our high school students who are not succeeding in the traditional classroom are more important now than ever. Students that might not have college aspirations need a solid foundation to enter the work force with marketable skills. Frankly, we think that more alternative programs are needed for high school students.

In closing, we believe that our partnership with you, the Board of Education and the State Government, in working for the best for all our students, families and staff, shows a strong

commitment to our common goals. As I said earlier, we all realize that the budget is very tight this year and that difficult choices must be made. We do not envy you this task. We do appreciate your careful and thoughtful consideration of our concerns.

Respectfully,

The Northeast Consortium Cluster Coordinators

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