The Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations

Testimony on the FY 2010 Operating Budget for Montgomery County Public Schools

Before the Board of Education

January 14, 2009

"Hold the Line….."

Good evening, President Brandman and Members of the Board of Education. I am Kay Romero, President of the Montgomery County Council of PTA's. We appreciate this opportunity to testify tonight on the MCPS Operating Budget. We understand that this year is going to be a time of fiscal challenges unlike any we have seen for almost two decades - perhaps even longer. It is essential that parents work with school, county, and state officials to avoid adverse effects of these economic challenges on our children. We'd like to thank the employees of Montgomery County and MCPS for engaging in the shared sacrifice this recommended budget represents.

As you know, with more than 50,000 members, MCCPTA represents a broad base of parent, teachers and students in Montgomery County. We began gathering information about parents' priorities and concerns in local area meetings over the summer. We introduced the MCCPTA Operating Budget Compact and Operating Budget Priorities Resolution at the September Delegates Assembly so that they could be discussed at local PTA meetings and voted on in the October Delegates Assembly. These documents have guided my participation in budget meetings with MCPS management and other stakeholders.

We agree with the underlying principle behind the FY2010 Recommended Operating Budget of minimizing impacts of cuts in the classroom; and we especially appreciate that this budget maintains most of the progress made in recent years in reducing class sizes, our longest-standing operating budget priority. The increasing diversity of MCPS students combined with more inclusion and more rigor make reasonable class sizes a necessity.

We recognize that in order to maintain class size, we are going to see cuts in almost everything else. But we have a few concerns about some of the planned cuts in areas that affect our other Operating Budget Priorities:

Safe, secure, well-maintained, healthy school facilities: As we have noted repeatedly, schools are not currently maintained as well as they should be. We note the elimination of 7 positions in the Division of Maintenance and 17.5 positions in the Division of Plant Operations, along with cuts in supplies, and no compensating increases in contractual services. Yet, a tight economy will not prevent roofs from springing leaks, boilers from breaking down, air filters from getting dirty, toilets from clogging, locks from breaking, or mold from growing in our classrooms. Such situations will continue to need attention this year as in other years. We cannot sacrifice our children's safety, security, or health to budget concerns. We'd like some assurance that the proposed reductions in these areas are not short-sighted invitations to emergency overtime or, worse, accelerated building deterioration.

Sensible, developmentally appropriate, fully supported curriculum implementation: We've noted in previous testimonies that in recent years major curriculum changes have been rolled out at a pace that has out-stripped staff development, instructional materials, and other student supports. This recommended operating budget includes significant reductions in the Office of Curriculum, in textbooks and materials, and in staff development. We request that in light of these cuts, MCPS be very mindful of the need to restrain roll-out of additional curriculum innovation without the necessary supports.

School-based community outreach: We all know that parents are critical to our kids' education. We need to improve the ability of families to communicate with their own children's schools. We have asked before for school-based community outreach in communities where language and cultural barriers are especially problematic, but this request has not been funded. We shouldn't give up on exploring other ways to enhance two-way communication and parent involvement.

Tailored support, especially for those who are performing below grade level, and enrichment programs for all students: Academic supports have taken many cuts in this recommended budget, ranging from reduced positions at signature and magnet programs to reductions in academic intervention teachers, alternative teachers, and high school literacy coaches. We will all need to work together to figure out how to fill in these holes. We certainly cannot afford any additional cuts in these areas, even if the fiscal situation deteriorates.

Our main message to you is that we will work with you to make the Superintendent's Recommended Operating Budget work for our children, but we have to hold the line against further cuts in the areas of our operating budget priorities. We pledge to work with you to secure funding as we promote a cooperative relationship with state and county officials, and ask that you hold firm in promoting full funding of this request and our budget priorities.

MCCPTA cluster coordinators will testify tonight as well as next week to raise concerns related to their specific clusters. Let their thoughts guide you as you make funding decisions about the FY2010 Superintendent's Recommended Operating Budget.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Kay Romero

President, Montgomery County Council of PTAs