

**Public Comment to the Board of Education on
The Role of Student Services and Parental Involvement Staff
September 24, 2007**

Good evening, my name is Jane de Winter and I am speaking on behalf of the Montgomery County Council of PTAs. I would like to begin by thanking you for the report on the Role of Student Services and Parental Involvement Staff which will be a discussion topic at tonight's meeting and which points out some obvious areas for improvement.

Staffing increases in the FY2008 budget greatly improved the student to counselor ratio at middle and high schools although high schools still have a significantly higher ratio. We know that middle school reform and the need to engage students at a critical juncture in their education is driving the lower ratio in middle schools. However, high school counselors face an additional work load, specifically the college application process. MCCPTA would like to see further reductions of the ratio at the high school level. The average ratio of 431 elementary school students to each counselor is quite high, but this masks the fact that at our five largest elementary schools, where enrollment last year ranged from 693-924 students, the ratio is huge. This summer local PTA leadership across the county expressed support for increasing counselor allocations at the largest elementary schools. We believe the ratio of one PPW to 2,978 students speaks for itself.

MCCPTA receives more questions and complaints about the School Improvement Plan process at local schools than almost any other local school/PTA issue. We hear from too many PTAs that no parents or only one parent were involved in the SIP process, and in many of these cases, the involvement comes only after staff has developed the goals and written the entire plan. MCCPTA expects that the Site Based Participatory Management Group will make strides toward developing specific guidelines for parental involvement in the SIP process.

The table listing staff involved in parental involvement highlights a serious deficiency in the way the school system has structured its parent involvement/engagement efforts. There are only 13.9 positions based at local schools. Local school-based parent outreach staff has been one of MCCPTA's highest priorities for several years. We see value in the Parent Academy and other efforts to teach parents how to become more engaged and advocate for their children. However, when parents who do not speak English or who face other cultural barriers seek to take this newly developed desired for involvement to their local schools, this desire runs into a brick wall when staff does not speak their language or is not culturally competent. MCCPTA would like to see the outcome of the project on Customer Service—we know parents frequently face barriers in the main school office which is often their first point of contact. In order to fully engage parents and allow them to be true advocates for their children, there must be local school based outreach staff to partner with parents.