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QUESTION:

Respond to the testimony from the Maryland Tax Education Foundation, especially the statements regarding SAT participation and results.

BUDGET PAGE REFERENCE: N/A

ANSWER:

The testimony of the Maryland Tax Education Foundation (MTEF) includes a statement that annual expenditures above inflation exceeded $350 million and questioned whether Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) has received sufficient value for this level of expenditure.

An analysis of expenditures from FY 1997 to FY 2005, the years covered by the MTEF study, shows that the MCPS Operating Budget increased by $694 million, a total of $312 million (34 percent) more than the total using constant 1997 dollars to discount the effects of inflation. Part of this increase above inflation was the result of enrollment growth, which was 14 percent during this period. The total number of positions increased by 4,871 (33 percent) during this period, partly due to enrollment growth and partly to new improvement initiatives. The percentage increase in the number of positions matches almost exactly the increase above inflation.

From FY 2001 through FY 2005, the Board of Education added 867.2 positions for new improvement initiatives alone at a cost of $72.0 million. The bulk of the other positions added related to enrollment growth and the opening of new schools. In addition to new positions, the budget increased above the level of inflation because of a number of cost factors. The major factor has been the increase in the cost of employee benefits, especially health insurance. The costs of health care have risen much faster than the rate of consumer price inflation as a whole. As a result, the cost of employee benefits increased by $150.2 million (99 percent) during the period MTEF reviewed. MTEF did not take this into account in their analysis. Additionally, costs incurred by schools, including textbooks, media materials, and energy have increased faster than the rate of inflation as a whole, often double the CPI rate or more. Per pupil costs also have increased because of the disproportionate increase in expenditures for special education and ESOL students, each of which increased by nearly 100 percent during the period under review. Attached is a chart that shows a comparative analysis of the figures used in the MTEF study.

Mr. Hooke stated that Montgomery County's SAT advantage over the national average was flat over the period 1997 to 2005. Mr. Hooke stated that Montgomery's student percentage SAT participation over the period remained the same (76 percent in 1997 vs. 77 percent in 2005); and there were no changes in ethnic racial composition of the SAT test takers over the last five years.

In response, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) has been approximately 70 points above the national average for the past nine years. However, this is noteworthy given the changes in the composition of MCPS SAT test takers.

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The percentages cited by Mr. Hooke were calculated using different enrollment rules and do not accurately reflect real increases in MCPS SAT participation. The participation rates reported by the College Board (and cited for 1997) are based on Grade 12 enrollment as of September 30 of the academic year. More recent publications (including the citation for 2005) calculate participation based on Grade 12 enrollment as of June of the academic year.

There has been a steady increase in MCPS SAT participation of more than 4 percentage points over the past five years and more than 5 percentage points over the past nine years (Table 1). This increase is especially noteworthy given the difficulty of increasing participation rates (ceiling effect) that exceed 70 percent of all students.

Table 1
Percentage of MCPS-Verified Students who Took the SAT by Graduating Class

	% of Test Takers by Graduating Class								
	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
All MCPS	71.1	71.6	72.6	72.9	72.4	74.0	73.5	73.1	76.5

Source: 2002 and 2005 MCPS SAT reports

Over the past nine years, there have been steady changes in the racial/ethnic composition of MCPS SAT test takers. Compared with the Classes of 1997 and 2001, SAT test takers in the Class of 2005 were more likely to be African American or Hispanic and less likely to be Asian American or White.

Table 2
Racial/Ethnic Composition of SAT Test Takers by Graduating Class

Race/Ethnicity	% of Test Takers by Graduating Class								
	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
African Am.	14.0	14.5	15.6	16.6	16.2	16.1	16.4	16.9	18.8
Asian Am.	18.1	18.3	18.5	18.0	17.3	18.3	17.3	17.7	17.8
Hispanic	5.8	6.8	7.3	7.1	7.9	8.3	7.7	8.2	9.7
White	61.8	60.1	58.4	58.1	58.3	57.1	58.4	57.1	53.4
American Indian	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.3

Source: 2002 and 2005 MCPS SAT reports

Mr. Hooke also stated that for Grades 3–8, the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) scores from 1997–2002 actually declined in Grade 3 for both reading and writing and fell in reading for Grade 5. However, the decline in scores that Mr. Hooke identified was not particular to MCPS students, but to students across the state. As shown on the table below, the performance of MCPS students follows the same performance pattern of students statewide. In all years, the performance of MCPS students was still above the performance of their peers in the state.

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Table 3
Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP)
Percentage of Students at the Satisfactory Level Statewide and in MCPS, 1997 to 2002

			1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Grade 3	Reading	State	36.8	41.6	41.2	39.2	36.5	30.7
		MCPS	46.0	51.5	48.9	44.2	37.6	31.4
	Writing	State	40.0	46.9	47.1	49.5	48.1	38.4
		MCPS	50.9	57.6	56.1	57.9	52.8	42.3
Grade 5	Reading	State	35.6	40.4	41.4	44.6	44.6	42.1
		MCPS	44.5	48.2	50.0	52.3	49.4	45.1

Source: Maryland State Department of Education. *Maryland School Performance Report. 2002 State and School Systems.*

In his testimony, Mr. Hooke stated that when the tests shifted to the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) in 2002, Montgomery's scores went up for Grades 3–8, but so did the rest of the state. He also said that MSA scores for Howard, Frederick and Anne Arundel counties started at the same base as Montgomery, and their increases were similar to Montgomery. He also asserted that Anne Arundel started with slightly lower scores and overtook Montgomery which also happened for Frederick in the 6th and 8th grades.

In response, the MSA was first given in 2003, and comparison of students' performance on the MSA with performances on MSPAP is not valid unless the tests that are being compared are equated (i.e., they have been statistically linked to ensure equivalency of item and overall test difficulty, item format, the content strands being measured, and scoring). The MSA and the MSPAP were not equated for several reasons. One major reason is that the MSPAP assessed students' skills using a performance-based format that required extensive science experiments and group activities.

The MSA assesses students' skills through selected and constructed response items that students tackle individually.

Mr. Hooke's comparison of the performance of MCPS students on MSA to students in Anne Arundel, Frederick, and Howard counties overlooks the large difference in total student enrollment between Montgomery County and the other three counties. In 2001–2002, Anne Arundel had a total of 75,081 students, Frederick had 38,022 students, and Howard had 46,257 students. In contrast, Montgomery County had 136,895 students, an enrollment that is about 22,500 students less than the combined enrollment in the other three counties.

Such a comparison further overlooks the differences in the composition of the student populations. At the elementary school level for example, Montgomery County had a much larger proportion of limited English proficiency (LEP) students than the other counties. This differential becomes even more significant when considering that during the administration of the 2003 MSA, federal regulations required that all LEP students had to participate in testing,

regardless of their English language proficiency level. The table below shows the differential in LEP enrollment.

Table 4
Number and Percent of Students Receiving
Limited English Proficiency Services

	LEP Enrollment Elementary Grade Levels	
	Number	Percent
Anne Arundel	734	2.1
Frederick	163	0.9
Howard	852	3.9
Montgomery	6,541	10.1

Source: Maryland State Department of Education. *Maryland School Performance Report. 2002 State and School Systems.*