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The Board of Education of Montgomery County met in special session at the Carver Educational Services Center, Rockville, Maryland, on Thursday, March 15, 1990 at 8:10 p.m.

ROLL CALL Present: Dr. Robert E. Shoenberg, President
in the Chair
Dr. James E. Cronin
Mr. Blair G. Ewing
Mr. Bruce A. Goldensohn
Mrs. Marilyn J. Praisner

Absent: Mrs. Sharon DiFonzo
Mrs. Catherine Hobbs
Ms. Alison Serino

Others Present: Dr. Harry Pitt, Superintendent
Dr. Paul L. Vance, Deputy Superintendent
Mr. Thomas S. Fess, Parliamentarian

Re: ANNUAL MEETING WITH MCCPTA

Dr. Shoenberg announced that Mrs. DiFonzo had a family commitment and could not attend the meeting, Mrs. Hobbs was out of town, and Ms. Serino had a previous commitment and could not attend. Dr. Shoenberg then introduced Brian Porter, information director, to MCCPTA representatives present.

Mrs. Jean Mallon, president of MCCPTA, introduced first vice president, Ginny Donahue, who in turn introduced Sally Schneider, area 3 vice president. Mrs. Schneider said that she felt fortunate to live in Montgomery County where opinions were solicited and voices of PTA volunteers were heard. The concern of many Area 3 people, however, was that often their responses were not timely because of communications problems. It seemed that PTA cluster coordinators did not have enough turnaround time when they were approached for input to MCPS on key issues. They had spoken with Dr. Pitt and Dr. Carl Smith, associate superintendent for human resources, about this problem and were grateful for their time and assistance in addressing this dilemma. Mrs. Schneider said that the major concern was that elected officers and cluster coordinators be put on a direct mailing route so that information would be received earlier than had been in the past on key issues on which the community needed to be informed and on which the community needed to respond. To address this problem, Mrs. Mallon would be meeting with Dr. Smith on a regular basis, and she was confident that this measure would prove to be very beneficial in closing this gap. Mrs. Schneider cited the most recent problem where she had just received a paper on the School Naming Policy on which responses were needed by March

16. She had to copy the paper and mail it to cluster coordinators, area vice presidents and Mrs. Mallon and pony it to three principals of new schools because they had not received it. This did not allow for any time to coordinate responses from Area 3 people. Mrs. Schneider said their concern was that the local people needed to be represented.

Dr. Shoenberg agreed that this was a serious oversight if indeed some of these people were not on mailing lists. Dr. Pitt said that Area 3 had contacted him several months ago that they had been having communications problems and tonight's meeting was in direct response to that concern. Dr. Smith will find out where the missing links are and will coordinate an effort to remedy this.

Dr. Cronin questioned what type of mail was being delayed. If it were policy and boundary issues, for example, this information should go to everyone with plenty of time for response back to MCPS.

Dr. Pitt agreed that this was a serious problem. In light of the fact that PTA structure had changed, cluster coordinators were key people in the process. Mr. Goldensohn said mailing labels would be a fairly simple resolution to this problem.

Howard Zuses, Sherwood cluster coordinator, said that communications really required more. He cited that he had received papers in his capacity as PTA president that cluster coordinators did not have. They respected the MCPS process and did what had to be done organized around that structure; but, MCCPTA was also an organization of many levels and they needed that same respect to do their job effectively. It was easier for Dr. Pitt to call his staff together than it was for MCCPTA people to call their people together. They just did not have that luxury as some PTAs only met monthly. This was a real hardship.

Gloria Martin-Pressman, corresponding secretary of MCCPTA, asked if there was any flexibility in turnaround time, especially when PTA people did not have papers soon enough. Dr. Shoenberg replied that in some instances they could make time extensions, but that depended on the particular policy. Mrs. Praisner said it would be useful to do an assessment of how long it took for something to get somewhere so that there was leadtime planned. Dr. Cronin asked if it would help MCCPTA to mail them a letter that a particular letter, policy, etc., would be forthcoming. Mrs. Mallon said that would help.

Mrs. Donahue said that they were concerned where MCCPTA stood in this process. PTA people wanted their input to be considered and they wanted to be listened to. There were decisions in which they wanted to have input and many people felt frustrated in the process. Mary Ann Bowen, area 1 vice president, agreed. They were getting mixed signals. They wanted to know where their input was

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most valid. They often felt like they were going through the motions.

Dr. Shoenberg clarified a misconception held by some PTA people that decisions were made before consultations were requested of the community. Often there was informal commentary on issues, but this did not mean that decisions had been made. Dr. Shoenberg's perception of a board of education was that Board members were representatives of the school system to the community and of the community to the school system. There were good means of communication, including telephones, cluster meetings, public comment time at Board meetings and letter writing. Some issues require hearings of the Board with the community, especially budget and boundary issues, and sometimes there had been other important issues that had required public hearings. The Board had been responsive in this way.

Dr. Cronin said that there didn't seem to be people contact. There was not one person from the PTA who could deal directly with the Board office.

Mrs. Praisner said there was more of that in the past because there were "Board watchers." The same people came to Board meetings, and if you did not see them, you wondered why they weren't there. There were a lot of people who had a sense of what the Board was doing at a given time. Mrs. Praisner suggested that there should be better contact between MCPS, the Board and PTAs, and strategies should be developed to train PTA people how to understand the system and how it functioned. Some ways to develop strong community/school relationships would be workshops, training sessions, cable TV, etc.

Mrs. Martin-Pressman thought this all boiled down to parent involvement. How should it be designed, implemented, how do you train people for this? Parents just did not have the time in today's society as they did years ago to come into the schools and volunteer their time. Mrs. Praisner thought it would be worthwhile to train parents and work with the PTAs.

Dr. Shoenberg agreed and said it would be valuable for MCPS to have a well-informed community, but it was not the job of MCPS to do this. People were already overburdened and stretched timewise with so many demands on them.

Dr. Pitt reminded everyone of the changes that have occurred in the county. The county had gone from a period of no growth to stabilized growth to rapid growth. The new schools that had been opened represented some twenty new communities. This resulted in change and more problems, still leaving a problem of how to best

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communicate. This was worth exploring and MCPS needed to explore the communication process because the problem would continue to accelerate.

Mrs. Rafel said it would be worthwhile for MCPS and the PTA to work together on this for a variety of reasons. First, people saw the Board in a wide view and that was very dangerous because it left people ignorant. They needed parent support. It was dangerous not to train people who were possibly the future members of the Board of Education.

Nancy Rea, Quince Orchard cluster coordinator, said that PTAs were being burdened with more and more responsibilities. For example, they had to talk about boundaries, site selections, the Sondheim report and the budget for starters. It was suggested that the responsibilities be broken down so that everyone did not have to be involved in every place. PTA presidents were getting tired of being called for more of their time. Dr. Shoenberg said he thought people did still want to be involved, and Mrs. Martin-Pressman agreed. It was important to her that the local voice still be heard and training would help, then people could pick and choose comfortably what they did or did not want to get involved in.

Dr. Cronin said that the Board was the barometer of the school system and the community. If there were two families who did not get information on a particular policy of significance, then the Board would stop the process to allow for them to be heard. The Board did not want to be seen as nonresponsive. The Board needed to be able to say it made the best effort and must make the best decisions possible.

Mr. Goldensohn said that Ann Rose, reporter for the Silver Spring RECORD, had been giving good coverage to the important issues with which MCPS deals, and did not limit her coverage to neighborhood interests.

Dr. Shoenberg reiterated the need he was hearing for training and said it should be looked into. He asked Mrs. Mallon to go back to her MCCPTA people and talk about the kinds of training they wanted and the Board would see what could be worked out.

Mrs. Phyllis Feldman said that she had heard that Mr. Larry Bowers, director of the department of management, budget and planning and Dr. Ken Muir, supervisor of management and planning services, were supposed to get back to the Board in April about the budget process, and she wondered where they were on that. Dr. Pitt responded that this was a follow-up and that Mr. Bowers and Dr. Muir were working together to develop information and he agreed to check it out.

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Mrs. Martin-Pressman said that what they had been talking about was parent involvement, and it had been discussed with the Board last fall. It was a crucial issue and a critical component to effective schools. Mrs. Martin-Pressman said that research showed that the parent was needed in the schools. She said that because of the multi-cultural diversity in Montgomery County, there were different levels and types of parenting. Parents had varying educational backgrounds, competence levels and knowledge of the school system.

She thought it would be good for staff, administrators and parents to be trained and educated about the different levels of involvement so that they could be accepting of the different ways parents could be involved. According to research by Joyce Epstein from Johns Hopkins, there were five types of parent involvement. The types of parent involvement are parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home and representing other parents. Although MCPS did a good job at attempting to reach these five different types of parents, there was still more that could be done. One idea was that school libraries have a parenting section and possible parenting courses conducted by counselors. Elementary schools seemed to be doing a good job in communicating, but it seemed to break down at the secondary level. Therefore, there was a loss of parent involvement at this level and this should be improved. Because of parental demands, there were fewer volunteers. MCPS should be creative about bringing in adults into the school system. The Basic Skills Project is a good learning at home effort, but Mrs. Martin-Pressman wondered how widely this was known and used. Regarding representing other parents, she thought a true partnership required respect and trust and people needed to be trained on how to work in the system. Teachers were not taught how to deal with parents by the universities and colleges. The question was how to train staff and parents to understand the different types of parent involvement and to be accepting of the types of involvement.

Dr. Cronin had proposed a committee on parent involvement, and Mrs. Martin-Pressman urged that the Board, MCPS and MCCPTA have a definition of what parent involvement was. All representatives could then come together to see where there was agreement and disagreement and go from there to establish a policy. There were examples cited of parent involvement initiatives in San Diego and Missouri and these would be good resources to look at. She urged that everyone join together to use the educated population available in Montgomery County to be advocates for all children.

Mrs. Praisner noted that she had promised a policy on parent involvement. It was in her computer in a draft form and would not be available for a while. She offered that maybe it would be good to have a committee look at a policy before actually drafting it.

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Staff needed to be clear as to what the system's expectations were and what was the definition of parental involvement. It was also important to be clear to parents as to what MCPS expectations of their involvement might be. Mrs. Praisner said that although she did not have to be the author of this document, she was anxious to get it out for reaction.

Mrs. Charlotte Joseph said that San Diego had adopted a policy of parent involvement in 1988. It had come about because all segments of the education community had input, including PTAs, staff, administration. Therefore, it would have to have clarity to it because everyone had to understand the terms. Mrs. Joseph said that she had met with parents from diverse backgrounds, and the same message kept coming across. Parents did not care about PTAs; they wanted to know how to help their children at home. She stressed that this was an old problem and that it needed to be put on the table or it should be forgotten.

Mrs. Martin-Pressman said she heard frustration from parents who wanted to be involved and wanted to help with decision-making and did not feel that they were being heard and that they were not taken seriously because they were only "volunteers." These people want to be involved, respected and heard. Training and understanding should address this problem.

Dr. Cronin wondered what MCPS was doing for the child once he had left the classroom. What was being done once the child went home? How could parents be involved when they were not familiar with what was going on in the schools? How were parents brought into the school/home equation? Dr. Cronin said that this is what he had in mind with the parent advisory group. Dr. Cronin thought that these might be the children who were lost in the system. Using Mrs. Praisner's policy and involving parents with the Board would be a good place to start closing the process.

Jose Gownder, area 1, said that there was a direct correlation between minority achievement and parent involvement. There were problems in getting minority parents involved in the system. Something had to be done to make them comfortable in the system, and this was important because there were so many minorities coming into MCPS. There were many schools where parents came into the schools just once a year, and some where parents didn't come in at all. If there were no parent involvement, there possibly would be no achievement. Children who have the potential often did not have the parental nurturing needed. These problems were not limited to minority students, but affect Chapter I students and others as well.

Mr. Ewing questioned Mrs. Martin-Pressman's statement about parents

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not feeling appreciated. They could get involved at all levels, including the teachers, the schools, the Board, the Council, and the area offices. Mr. Ewing wondered what was the severity of this assertion. Mrs. Martin-Pressman said she was not sure if it was truly global. Many people had come away feeling this way, but it was a problem because so many people just did not have the time to do the job anymore. A few people were trying to do the job, but at great cost because it often required that children be left home alone at night so parents could be involved. It was a big struggle, and she felt that the articulate voices were being lost.

Parents were feeling frustrated that they were making sacrifices to volunteer their time and that decisions were being made without them. With school-based management being tested, parents needed to be educated about it. Parent involvement had to be defined. Were parents really wanted to help make decisions? Everyone had to be clear on this.

Mr. Ewing said that it was a problem of a large bureaucracy to communicate with everyone. All too often large numbers of people would come out for a hearing, and after the decisions were made, they did not come to see how the decisions were made. People get pumped up to give testimony, and then they do not come out to see the decisions. Mr. Ewing said he would rather it be the other way around. Mr. Ewing thought MCPS and the Board should do a better job of explaining to the public what it is that the Board and MCPS do.

Dr. Cronin said that meetings already were being covered by the press, cable, The BULLETIN and phone messages, and he wondered what more could possibly be done short of telephoning everyone. Mrs. Joseph clarified that decisions could be at the local school. If the local school welcomed parents and worked with them so that the home and school were both backing up the children, the parent would most likely continue working with the school and then would hear about Board activities and how children would be affected. It was a continual process starting with the local school and local principal.

Dr. Pitt said that over the years schools had been asked to reach out and he saw significant efforts this year to include parents in the schools, to communicate with them and work with them. This was different from including parents in the decision-making process of the school system. It was a two-pronged effort. One school was keeping a record of all contacts made with parents to develop a schematic impression of how the parenting process was working out.

Dr. Pitt said that he was in favor of a policy and that communication did need to be improved. He was concerned if progress was not being made with teachers to recognize the importance of working with parents. Mrs. Martin-Pressman

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clarified that four types of parent involvement were being fairly well addressed by MCPS, but it was the fifth area, recruiting and training parent leaders, that was the weak link. Mrs. Joseph said that it was an on-going process that had to be repeated as parents moved from stage to stage with their children and new parents became involved. Dr. Pitt noted that the secondary process was different than the elementary process.

Mr. Goldensohn said that it was important for parents to become involved at an early level of their child's education. Some parents felt that it was the school system's responsibility to care for the child during the day and the parent did not have any responsibility during that time. The Shawnee Mission school system had a time to meet with parents of toddlers to help them with parenting skills. Years ago, parents did not have training in child rearing. It often was a hit and miss effort, but parents did the best job they could. When parents became involved with their children at a young age, they tended to stay involved with the child throughout his school years. It was important for MCCPTA to get parents into the PTA in the first place by having them pay their dues and get them in the front door. Mrs. Donahue asked that MCPS try to be receptive. When a parent came to a school, they should not be greeted by an angry staff person. Every principal needed to be tuned in to this and pass this sensitivity along to their staff. Parents should be viewed as a resource and not as a threat. Parental involvement should be a positive experience and MCPS could create that climate.

Dr. Pitt responded that it was a goal for MCPS this year to improve upon this relationship. All too often parents were brought in when the children had problems and that was the first glimpse a parent had of the school. A parent's first experience with a school should be a positive experience. This had to start early. Mr. Ewing said he thought a better job was now being done with letting parents know through principals and teachers more about what the schools were doing and what the children were doing in the schools. Teachers were clear about the need to communicate, but there was another step and that was participation in both directions. While it was clear that MCPS could not respond to every parental request, it was important that staff take time with parents. Mr. Ewing agreed with Mrs. Martin-Pressman's point about teachers not having any training in dealing with parents and this was very important. Workshops would be a possibility, but Mrs. Donahue said that a one-half day workshop would not be sufficient.

Mr. Goldensohn said that one problem was that teachers and parents all worked during the daytime at their jobs. Therefore, meetings with parents and staff usually took place at night. Coffees were held at some schools during the day, but not everyone could

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participate in these because of their working schedules. A possible solution would be to have a staff member available in the evenings for parents.

Mr. Gownder said that four years ago Einstein High School had toured the staff throughout the community before school started on a school bus so that teachers could see where the children were coming from. Teachers' attitudes changed after they knew the children's backgrounds. They were amazed at the diversity of the students and their differing living conditions. This was a form of outreach. The parents felt comfortable with this, and Dr. Pitt's ideas of using different languages for communicating with these parents was good. This often resulted in parent involvement at the schools.

Mrs. Schneider echoed her agreement of the idea of bus tours for teachers into the communities at the beginning of the school year, especially for the new schools, for staff to get a general idea of the students' backgrounds. Dr. Pitt said that had been done in many schools, although it had not been done in every case.

Mrs. Rafel said that she agreed that parent involvement was good, but it must be defined as to why it was good - because it educated kids, because it was moving towards site-based management and that would offer a sense of ownership of the community. Without the sense of ownership, parents could be taught parenting skills, but that would not result in the needed relationships between parents and the staff and parents and their children. Dr. Pitt said that had to be worked out, although it seemed to be improving. The bottom line was what should that role be and how far should it go, what was reasonable and effective? Dr. Pitt was not clear on the whole picture. After visiting several flexibility projects, he saw different levels of current involvement in the decision-making process, some of which was positive and some which would be more time consuming to do the same thing. Mrs. Praisner clarified that the point Dr. Pitt was making was the parent involvement for the sake of involvement was not the bottom line. There were limitations in what parents were expected to do in this decision-making process. That was why people were hired to do certain things and make decisions. This must be clear in order for everyone to be absolutely sure of individual expectations.

Mrs. Donahue summed it up that everyone was saying parent involvement was important, but everyone had different ideas, but it was important to move on it now. Dr. Shoenberg disagreed that there had been no movement on it, and mentioned that Dr. Pitt had pointed out that he had encouraged parent involvement in the schools and that parents were welcomed in the schools. The Board, however, would be returning to this issue.

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Dr. Pitt said he wanted to be clear about the difference between the flexibility project where you are talking about decision-making and parent involvement. He was supportive of parent involvement and schools being open to parents so that principals and teachers communicate what was happening in school and seek parental input on what was going on with their children. Parents should be involved in the education of their children and should know what schools expect of the children. A written policy expressing MCPS feelings about and goals for parent involvement would be a good idea. Dr. Pitt agreed that type 5, recruiting and training parent leaders, finding a support process, was a critical area in need of improvement. Dr. Pitt said that Mr. Ewing's idea to give teachers more training in this process was a good one.

Mrs. Schneider said that an important link in this was the support staff who were the first line of communication between the school and the families. The first person a parent saw was the school secretary, and she could set the tone of that visit.

Mrs. Mallon moved the discussion to the issue of multi-cultural diversity within the school community and the hate/violence problems in the county and the concern that this was on the rise. The MCCPTA and school system needed to work together to address this issue.

Dr. Shoenberg thanked the MCCPTA for a good discussion.

Re: ADJOURNMENT

The president adjourned the meeting at 9:50 p.m.

PRESIDENT

SECRETARY

HP:nwd