

**Testimony (of Jane de Winter) before the Board of Education on the  
Montgomery County Public Schools Strategic Plan and  
FY2008 Operating Budget  
October 12, 2006**

The Montgomery County Council of PTAs (MCCPTA) is pleased to have this opportunity to offer comments on behalf of its 51,000 members regarding the MCPS Strategic Plan and the FY2008 Operating Budget.

As you know, the strategic plan is more than 60 pages long and it is impossible to give detailed comments in three minutes. Consequently, tonight I will touch on some of our highest priorities based on our advocacy priorities and meetings with PTA leaders across the county.

**Goal One: Success for Every Student**

Parents are most concerned with increasing the academic achievements of all students. Investments in early education at our elementary schools, including all day kindergarten and lowered class size, have resulted in well-publicized gains in literacy and mathematics among our elementary students. Similar investments must now extend into middle school reforms that offer increased academic rigor and lower class sizes. This includes investment in programs such as the special education hours based staffing model that staffs based on services required rather than a head count and lowered general education class sizes to allow schools to successfully mainstream more students under the least restrictive environment model.

We continue to support broadening the scope of the strategic plan to provide more and varied alternatives in least restrictive education and efforts to address continuing special education achievement gaps.

MCCPTA supports increased funding for educational programs and initiatives to stem the tide of youth violence in schools and classrooms that range from bullying to recruitment into gangs with special attention at the middle school level.

A significant minority achievement gap still exists across the county, as do gaps related to poverty. Programs and initiatives to address these gaps are needed from early childhood to high school.

Parent community outreach is of vital importance in Montgomery County to tear down the barriers that impede parents' ability to become involved in their child's education. There is a need for improved translation services available at the local school level and a great need for school based bilingual outreach personnel.

Below is the letter addressed to the Board of Education from Jane de Winter, MCCPTA:

Dr. Charles Haughey, President  
Montgomery County Board of Education  
850 Hungerford Drive  
Rockville, MD 20850  
October 12, 2006

Dear Dr. Haughey and members of the Board of Education:

You may be aware that the Board of Education Policy Committee recently had a discussion regarding the July 18, 2006, Board resolution that the Policy Committee develop a new policy or procedure to define the expectations, rules, and responsibilities of public hearings.

Much of this discussion centered on what MCCPTA could do to make the testimony less repetitive, less boring, and more valuable to Board of Education members.

MCCPTA believes that scheduling predetermined times for Cluster Operating Budget Testimony would help achieve those goals. Currently some cluster coordinators meet as areas with their MCCPTA area vice president, community superintendent, and Budget Director Marshal Spatz in the period between the release of the operating budget and the public hearings. These meetings afford clusters the opportunity to ask questions as to how the proposed budget affects their schools and the county overall. The cluster coordinators then discuss their common goals and divide these testimony priorities among themselves.

This process allows these clusters to provide more in depth, relevant testimony on fewer topics and eliminates some of the repetition, which occurs when clusters do not coordinate their testimony. MCCPTA has been encouraging all cluster leadership to follow this or a similar model for operating budget testimony.

However, we believe that for this process to be fully effective, the clusters within each area must be able to testify in sequence, something that will not happen if each cluster is required to phone in to obtain a testimony slot.

For this reason, MCCPTA requests that the Board of Education take action at the next Board of Education meeting to restore predetermined testimony slots to MCCPTA clusters during the operating budget hearings.

Sincerely,  
Jane de Winter  
President