

Ellen Paul Testimony at Public Forum on MCPS Strategic Plan and FY 2008 Operating Budget October 12, 2006 Carver Auditorium

My name is Ellen Paul. I am speaking tonight as an individual basing my testimony in part on my past three years experience as cluster coordinator for the Walter Johnson Cluster and 13 years experience as a parent of three MCPS students. Our first cluster meeting is next week, and we are urging parents to send their individual comments to you via the blue card or on-line,

In what areas is the school system doing well?

Edline, thank you. Edline is fantastic. Parents are thrilled with this opportunity to stay informed about how their children are doing. This is revolutionizing parent-teacher communications. The sooner Edline is in all secondary schools, the better.

Lower class sizes. The class size reduction initiative really makes a difference, especially in classes with varied differentiation and many ESOL students.

All-day kindergarten. This is helping prepare all students for future learning.

Honors/AP/IB. I am pleased to see MCPS's performance targets of increasing the percentage of students earning 3 or better on one AP/IB test. I am also happy to see MCPS's goal of enrolling more students in Honors/AP/IB classes, and I would hope that MCPS is closely monitoring the "vertical articulation" (or whatever the process is now called) to make sure students have the building blocks of essential skills required to excel in more challenging courses.

In what areas can the school system improve?

1. Maintenance. Increase funding to eliminate maintenance backlogs. Accelerate the modernization of our school facilities. While the modernization is a CIP issue, it is, of course, relevant because we wouldn't have so many things that need regular maintenance if we had new buildings in working order. While maintenance is not the first thing that usually comes to mind what you think about your child's education, a safe, clean, healthy and modern school facility does impact a student's learning. Students deserve adequate fresh air, safe and functional plumbing, and temperature control.

2. Middle school reform. We need middle school reform with increased rigor to prepare students for the challenging and increased expectations of high school. We need more highly qualified teachers in middle schools, and lower class sizes, which is especially helpful in mainstreaming special education students. We need investment in programs such as the special education hours-based staffing model that staffs based on services required rather than the current head count approach.

3. Minority achievement gap. A significant minority achievement gap and poverty achievement gap still exists across the county. Programs and initiatives to address gaps by under performing students are needed from early childhood to high school. Ensure all students master the essential math, reading, and writing skills that will allow them to perform well in high school.

4. Literacy focus. Secondary literacy will require funding for literacy coaches, embedding more literacy into content areas, and remediation efforts to raise the performance of under performing students.

5. Textbooks. I know from my experience; in the WJ cluster that we still continue to have textbook shortages at all three levels.

6. Counseling. We need more counselors at the high school level. We seem to exceed the MCPS

target ratio of 250 to 1 in our quad cluster (includes B-CC, Whitman, Wheaton).

7. ESOL. ESOL families continue to seek out limited parent outreach resources and/or find school staff on site that speak foreign languages.

If the board of education received extra resources for the operating budget, what would be the best use of the resources?

I would put that money to use in the above list of areas that the school system needs to improve.

High school students must pass the high school assessments (HSA) in order to graduate starting with the class of 2009. What is needed in order to ensure that all high school students pass the HSA exams?

1. Literacy. Check reading ability and reading comprehension early and often during a student's time at MCPS. Please see above comments on literacy.

2. Math. Given that the Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) has recently changed their entire philosophy on teaching math to focus more on essential skills in preparation for algebra and more advanced math, MCPS should adapt to math curriculum accordingly.