

**Testimony before the Board of Education  
on the MCPS Strategic Plan and FY 2008 Operating Budget By Victor Salazar  
on behalf of Co-Chairs Emily Sudbrink and Gretchen Hillburger The Maryland  
International Corridor Youth Violence and Gang Prevention Networking Group October  
12,2006**

President Haughey, Vice-President Cox and Members of the Board of Education:

Good evening, I am Victor Salazar, Executive Vice-Chair of the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board, a member organization of the Maryland International Corridor Youth Violence and Gang Prevention Networking Group.

We want to thank the Board of Education for providing community stakeholders not previously involved in the budget process, this opportunity, to testify and comment on the MCPS Strategic Plan and Operating Budget.

The Maryland International Corridor Youth Violence and Gang Prevention Networking Group is a coalition of private organizations, public agencies and institutions who have committed to reducing youth violence and gang involvement in the school communities and neighborhoods served by Silver Spring International Middle School, Eastern Middle School, and Takoma Park Middle School.

Led by the Montgomery County Public Schools Department of Safe and Drug Free Schools, and the Maryland International Corridor CSAFE Initiative, OUR group has met regularly since November 2004 to share information about youth violence and gang involvement, network resources, and plan events that raise community awareness, such as the YOUTH AND FAMILY FAIR Gang and Violence Prevention Forum held last Spring at MONTGOMERY Blair High School.

We would like to focus this evening on Goal One of MCPS' Strategic Plan, Ensure Success for Every Student, and the implementation strategies that address removing barriers to learning-student services and mental health. The MCPS Operating Budgets from FY2001-2007, reflect a \$2.4 million investment towards achieving this goal by funding additional counseling staff, psychologists, implementing the collaborative action process (CAP) and other initiatives focused on removing barriers to learning and ensuring student success.

According to the MSDE 2005 Report on School Suspensions, MCPS reported 4406 suspensions related to attacks, threats of physical harm and actual fighting. Additionally, 2341 suspensions resulted from student disrespect, insubordination and disruption in the classroom. MCPS' Department of Reporting and Regulatory Accountability reports that in FY 2000, 4301 students were suspended from MCPS. Each year thereafter the total number of suspensions increased and in FY 2005, 6335 students were suspended from MCPS. A 67% increase despite the monetary investments and initiatives implemented to keep this trend from rising.

This data indicates that our school system continues to face a growing challenge with regards to mental and physical wellness of our children. Additional supports must be provided to our schools in order to provide every student a facility that is a safe and secure learning environment where optimal learning can take place. It is essential that these supports extend into the classroom environment to remove the threats of bullying and youth violence that pose barriers to effective instruction and student success.

We appreciate the Board of Education's past investments in suppression and enforcement that has helped keep students safe and secure. Thus, we support continued funding for current initiatives that remove student barriers to learning. Furthermore, we advocate for the investment of additional operating funds to be used to support:

1. "In school" mentoring programs
2. Violence prevention training for students and staff, such as the "Get Real About Violence" curriculum and "Second Step"
3. Direct access to prevention and intervention programs which link youth and families to available services,
4. School-community partnerships with the goal of reducing school violence, fighting and assaults

We would like to thank the Board of Education for this time to testify in support of programs and initiatives that address the root causes to the barriers to student learning and ensure success for every student.

Attachment 1

### **Gang Prevention Networking Group Partners List**

Boys and Girls Club of Greater Washington Conflict Resolution Center of Montgomery County Eastern Middle School Juvenile Justice Family Advocacy Initiative & Resources (JJFAIR) Linkages To Learning Maryland International Corridor CSAFE Maryland Multi-Cultural Youth Center Montgomery County Community Partnership Montgomery County Police Department Montgomery County Public Schools, Safe and Drug Free Schools Montgomery County Department of Recreation Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations, Inc. Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board Silver Spring International Middle School Takoma-Langley Crossroads Youth Opportunities Center Takoma Park Middle School YMCA, Youth and Family Services