

**Montgomery County Board of Education Testimony
by Merle Cuttitta, President SEIU Local 500
October 12, 2006**

**President Haughey, Vice President Cox, Members of the Board of Education, Dr. Weast,
and Community Leaders:**

Good evening. I am Merle Cuttitta and I am proud to serve as President of Service Employees International Union, Local 500. We represent over 10,000 men and women working in the field of education, throughout Maryland and Washington, DC. Included among these 10,000 are nearly 8500 supporting service employees working for the Montgomery County Public Schools.

What are our priorities for the FY 08 operating budget? We need the resources necessary to make a meaningful contribution to student achievement in Montgomery County. How many times have we said it?

Students can not learn if they can not arrive at school safely, and on time, prepared to learn.

Students can not learn if they do not have a safe, well maintained, healthful learning environment in their schools

Students cannot achieve the kinds of results expected by this community without the small group and individualized instructional support that comes from our paraeducators and media assistants.

Teachers and Administrators cannot be successful in their work without timely administrative and data support.

The members of SEIU Local 500 care deeply about the mission of our school system, and pride themselves in making a difference. They have invested their time and their talents into the success of our students and our counting on us to invest in their ability to make a difference.

We need a more concerted effort to provide better training for support staff. That includes contributing to their success in their current positions. It also means a new covenant between support staff and the Board of Education, where excellence in service to our school system is rewarded with career advancement opportunities for those seeking a career in the field of education.

It means continuing to improve the staffing in Plant Operations and maintenance, where staffing continues to fall further and further behind the pace of school system expansion.

Finally, if we are going to continue raising expectations of those who provide instructional and data support to student achievement, we need to ensure an operational structure that gives paraeducators and instructional data assistants a voice and a presence at the highest levels of instructional and curriculum decision making. These nearly 3,000 individuals contribute every day to evaluating student progress, as well as providing direct instruction to students. School systems in different parts of the country have created positions in their staff leadership to coordinate this critical work. We think it is time that MCPS consider creating a similar position or positions in our school system.

MCPS support staff are simply the finest there are. We feel the difference everyday in our schools, in our depots and in our offices. We can not continue to raise the bar, without being mindful of the impact such efforts have on those whose work makes the "trains run on time."

Thank you.