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Testimony to MCPS Board of Education
10/11/2007

I am Dr. Leigh Leslie and am speaking on behalf of the **Loiederman Middle School PTSA**. I would like to thank Dr. Weast, and members of the Board of Education for your vision in creating the outstanding middle school magnet consortium. I am here to ask that you continue to support the magnet consortium when the federal grant establishing this program ends this year. By any metric you use the middle school magnet consortium has been a success. The three schools made all AYPs this year, turning around their poor academic performance prior to the magnet. Additionally, they have met the original goals of the grant of minimizing the socioeconomic and racial isolation of the original students. Although a less quantifiable achievement, the schools have also built enthusiastic whole school communities around their signature programs. As the parent of a Takoma Park student I have seen first hand the "school within a school" magnet model that can lead to elitism and separateness. But with these programs you have created a challenging, inclusive experience that brings students together. Perhaps most importantly, unlike other middle school magnets that serve largely White and Asian students, these whole school specialized programs are providing an enriched educational experience to a large number of low-income and Latino students, two groups that Ms. Navarro identified as specific priorities in her letter to The County Council.

The middle school consortium has achieved everything you hoped for and more. However, these schools will not be able to maintain their achievements if the budget items covered by the federal grant are not picked up by MCPS. First, for Loiederman, it is critical that we continue to have the 8 course schedule that allows students to take two electives in the creative and performing arts. We are able to do this because the additional 2.5 faculty lines included in the grant. If these lines are not in the '09 budget, Loiederman's principal will be required to cut the sections of arts by almost half. If students are given only one arts elective from a reduced selection, it will not be long before the magnet loses its appeal and the

number of students applying decline. Were that to happen, MCPS would be back in the same position they were before the magnet program began.

Second, it is equally important that the magnet coordinator position be continued to insure that the magnet program is academically challenging and administratively efficient.

Finally, as you make funding decisions, we ask that you revisit your transportation policy and consider providing county-wide transportation for this magnet. The current policy has created a significant drain of students from nearby middle schools. With no transportation, it is not surprising that the bulk of out-of-consortium students come from schools in the Downcounty Consortium where parents can drive. We believe that by providing county-wide transportation, you can stem the drain of students from these schools as more students enter the selection pool and the percentage of students selected from nearby schools decreases.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you and thank you for the middle school magnet consortium. We hope for your continued support of the outstanding magnet you have established.