

**BOE Community Forum  
On Behalf of the Blair Cluster PTAs  
October 11, 2007**

**Speaker: Pete Lafen, Blair Cluster Coordinator (serving with Bladimir Duenas)**

Good Evening. I am happy to speak with you about our Blair Cluster schools, and the challenges and programs linked to progress toward achieving the Core Values of the Guiding Tenets of MCPS and the Strategic Plan.

- 1. Every child can learn and succeed.**
- 2. The pursuit of excellence is fundamental and unending.**
- 3. An ethical school system requires fair treatment, honesty, openness, integrity.**
- 4. A high-quality school system strives to be responsive and accountable to the customer.**

**Facility Support for Academic Commitments: Pursuing the Achievement of Fundamental Academic Excellence**

The Blair cluster and the Down County Consortium are home to many special programs that are designed to bring rigor and opportunity to students in many ways. We must support our new academic commitments with facility improvements that permit them to fulfill their promises.

Our commitment to small class size and excellence in early childhood education must be supported by on time planning and construction of facilities at Takoma Park Elementary school, East Silver Spring Elementary school and Montgomery Knolls Elementary school.

In the DCC high schools we made commitments to students in academies in the communications arts, science, the performing arts and other academic concentrations. We must be prepared to build the facilities in all DCC schools that students need to complete their academy programs. At Blair this means the construction of a small theater venue for capstone performances, debates, and other small learning academy events that are far too small for our auditorium or other existing facilities. It means the expansion and modernization of media facilities to support the communications arts and media literacy programs, and it means additional lab facilities to support the science and math academy.

**Continue and Expand Outreach, Education and Translation: So Every Child can Learn and Succeed**

We must have school based, office and outreach staff to communicate with parents who do not speak English or who are fundamentally unfamiliar with the workings, opportunities, and challenges of our complex school system. We have seen how vitally important it is to have staff members in the school office who speak the native language of parents, and have seen how important to the life of a school it is to have a staff member who is dedicated to reaching out to parents who would not otherwise know what they and their children are missing. The need for these positions must be assessed, and the positions funded and staffed so that principals and PTAs know that they can

effectively communicate with their parents in their school. This is a vitally important and unending challenge, as is the need for effective parent involvement training that is being met by Conquistas Tu Suenas and other parent education programs.

### **Middle School Reform Progress and Problems: The Pursuit of Excellence for Every Child, Fundamental, and Unending**

We join in applauding the success of the middle school magnet consortium, another step in MCPS achieving a middle school program of excellence for all students. This past spring, a committee of parents, faculty and administrators reviewed the progress and problems of our own Blair Cluster Middle School Magnets.

We learned of :

The whole school magnets with programs open to all who wished to participate, including the middle years IB program at Silver Spring International Middle School.

The upcounty magnets with places reserved for aspiring base area students.

The opening of Takoma Middle magnet math and science classes to students in the community willing and able to take on the challenge.

Now, in the twentieth year of the Eastern Magnet, it is time to provide access to that program to aspiring students from our base area community, and to address through transportation, or choice, the needs of the SSIMS community to support attendance in their Middle Years IB program, while addressing the needs of our other DCC middle schools.

### **Hiring, Firing, Enrollment and Class size: A System Responsive and Accountable to its Students**

The dark and difficult art of enrollment prediction is failing our students. Low enrollment estimates and late registrations are resulting in the loss of critical staff members and overcrowding of classrooms at Blair and other DCC schools. We need to have a more flexible system that recognizes the patterns of late enrollment, and avoids the loss of AP and honors qualified staff in order to protect teachers needed to keep grade level classes from being overcrowded when final attendance is achieved.

### **Traffic Calming and Pedestrian Safety Investment: A Simple Matter of Life and Death**

Middle and High Schools located on state highways and major arterials present pedestrian safety hazards throughout the state. We need an effective coalition of Boards of Education, County Governments, and State Legislatures, to make speed control and safe pedestrian facilities an investment priority throughout Maryland. I know that Middle and High school PTAs in this county stand ready to partner with you to make the environments around our schools as safe as the environments you provide within them.

Finally, we know that this will be a difficult budget year, but you asked. We look forward to working with you and with MCPS staff on these issues through the CIP and Operating Budget meetings to come.