

**Montgomery County Board of Education  
Community Forum Testimony  
October 11, 2007**

Good evening. My name is Ricky Ford and along with Karen Sullivan, I serve as an MCCPTA Cluster Coordinator for the John F. Kennedy Cluster of schools. On behalf of the Kennedy Cluster, thank you for allowing me to speak at this community forum.

I'd like to personally thank you for your previous support of the Kennedy Cluster and for being responsive to all of the issues that we've presented in previous testimonies before the Board. You've proven that the Board takes community/parent testimony seriously and that we are not engaging in an act of futility when we testify. Thank you.

The Kennedy Cluster still has many needs and they echo the items that you will hear this evening, which are associated with all of the Down County Consortium (DCC) Schools: Parent Community Outreach Coordinators, facility needs funding, increasing the number and retention rate of highly qualified teachers and principals. However, this evening our testimony focuses on the Kennedy Cluster Middle Schools: Argyle and E. Brooke Lee.

Argyle Middle School is one of the three middle schools participating in the Middle School Magnet Consortium (MSMC). The Federal grant that funded the MSMC expires this fiscal year. We would like to ensure that MCPS continues funding for the MSMC.

The goals of the MSMC are:

- Improve performance at Consortium schools
- Broaden student choices in middle school programs
- Decrease socioeconomic isolation in Consortium schools

A review of the data shows that the MSMC has been successful and is having a positive impact on the community. The performance at the MSMC schools has improved and the schools are becoming more attractive to parents/students. Students have more options to choose from because of the resources allocated to the schools and the structure of the Master Schedules.

Argyle's reputation at one point was not as positive as one would have liked, and children attended the school because they were required to go. Argyle is now viewed totally differently. Parents/children are choosing to attend Argyle. A number of these parents may have chosen to send their children to private schools in the past. There is a true sense of pride within the school and the surrounding community. This change is a direct reflection of the MSMC and the effective administration of the program by the Argyle administrators.

One of the unintended side effects of the success of the MSMC is that the other DCC middle schools are losing some of the high performing incoming sixth graders from its elementary feeder schools. The effects of this are no more dramatic than what is

currently happening at E. Brooke Lee Middle School. There may have been as many as 30 fifth-graders from the Lee elementary feeder schools' (Glenallan and Kemp Mill) that chose to attend another middle school. The programs available at the other schools were probably much more attractive than what is currently available at Lee.

The loss of these potential sixth-graders is painful for Lee, especially since Lee is such a small middle school with less than 500 students. It makes it much more challenging to develop the Master Schedule or to offer many appealing electives to students. This also makes it more challenging for Lee to make AYP, attract potential students, and have a positive impact on the school's reputation within the community.

I have a daughter who is currently in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade at Lee. When we were deciding which middle school she would attend we looked at a number of venues. We decided to send her to Lee because we were assured that she would receive an excellent education and we also wanted her to matriculate through school with some of her peers from elementary school.

We have discovered that Lee has some fantastic, energetic, caring teachers and administrators and our daughter has continued to excel. She is being challenged each day in the classroom, is starting to accumulate high school credits, and she looks forward to going to school. A few weeks ago, I heard her say under her breath "I love Lee". That statement, along with the quality of the education that she is receiving, affirmed that we made the right decision.

The reality of the current situation is that Lee has to compete with the other middle schools for incoming students and that is difficult without the ability to offer a signature or program. As a result, we are advocating for the development of a signature program for Lee.

We are aware that MCPS administrative staff is aware of the challenges facing Lee and have taken actions to start to address the issue. We thank you for the Promethean Boards: and Lights, Camera, Literacy and Perspectives in the Arts courses. However, MCPS must do more and we don't have the luxury of waiting years to respond. Things need to be done now so that they can be in place for the next school year. There has to be some definitive items in place, very soon, in order for Ms. Cobbs, Lee's Principal, and her staff to market to parents and students by the Spring of 2008.

In summary we recommend the following:

- The MSMC program is fully funded for all MSMC schools next year.
- Lee MS has resources/programs allocated to it to allow it be more competitive with the surrounding middle schools next year.

Thank you for your attention to these matters.