

BOE Community Forum

On Behalf of the Northwood Cluster and the Task Force to Improve our Schools

October 11, 2007

Speaker: Jennifer Chambers, Northwood Cluster Co-coordinator and Task Force to Improve our Schools Co-coordinator

Thank you very much for providing two community forums at which your constituents can voice their praise and concerns about MCPS. I am representing two groups of constituents this evening: the Northwood Cluster and the Task Force to Improve our Schools. The Task Force is made up of concerned parents and PTA leadership from several different schools in the Down County Consortium (DCC) who have joined together to address long-term concerns in the DCC high, middle, and elementary schools. The Task Force advocates on three issues: improvement and equity in all DCC facilities, improvement in community input into MCPS decision making (tonight is an example of this), and the retention of quality principals and teachers.

I am here to speak about the problems with the retention of principals and teachers in DCC schools. A number of schools in the DCC have experienced high turnover among their administrators, teachers, and support staff. Repetitive and high turnover in a school affects the relationships and stability within the school community. The instability created by turnover impacts the bottom line, the educational achievement of students. MCPS has been working to close the achievement gap, particularly in the DCC where schools have higher FARMS, ESOL, and mobility rates. The instability created by principal and teacher turnover hampers MCPS's goal of closing the achievement gap.

Attached to my written testimony is an informal survey disseminated to PTA leadership in the DCC and individuals participating in the Task Force. With short notice, seven schools, primarily in the Northwood and Blair Clusters, provided feedback to the questions asked. The following information represents their feedback on the issue of principal and teacher retention.

Principal Retention

- I asked the question of how many principals each school has had in the last 10 years.

School	Number of principals	Years
Silver Spring International MS	5	7
Highland View ES	4 (3 in last 5 years)	10
Sligo Creek ES	4	7
Rolling Terrace ES	7 administrators (principals, APs, and interns)	6*
Rock View ES	2	10
Northwood HS	1	4
Montgomery Blair HS	2	10

\*only given information for last six years

- I asked individuals to provide information on how principals were hired and their experiences with the hiring process. The standard stakeholder hiring process was used about half of the time. Many times principals left at inconvenient times of the school year (eg. July); therefore, an interim principal was hired. I found inconsistencies in

peoples experiences with the hiring process. These inconsistencies include translation of information and at meetings, location of interviews (schools or Rockville), and diversity of interview panel. The most frequently mentioned comment was MCPS (central office) did not listen to the needs of the stakeholders in the hiring process. In each case, the stakeholder's input provided went beyond the standard five characteristics fill-in sheet. For example, in 2004, the SSI community specifically requested MCPS hire a principal with middle school experience. The principal hired only had elementary school experience and retired at the end of the school year not having a successful year at SSI.

Teacher Retention

- In the last five school years, I asked individuals what the teacher turnover percentage was for their school. Rates varied from year to year in a school and between schools. In most schools, only a handful of teachers have stayed at a particular school for more than 5 years. For example,

Rock View ES	3 teachers have been there for 7+ years
Silver Spring International MS	5 teachers have been there since the school started
Sligo Creek ES	4 teachers in the Academy have been there for more than 2 years

- There are many reasons for teacher turnover; some are out of the control of the school system, for example: family issues and commitments, long commute times, childcare, and teaching at a school with perceived easier work loads (i.e., lower ESOL and mobility rates).
- A school system has more control over some reasons, principal retention and condition of the facility. The teacher turnover rates I received were highest in a school year either when schools were transitioning between principals or after the new principal's first year. For example, at Rock View ES, twenty-eight teachers left the school after the principal's first year. At SSI, approximately 25% left during the principal transition and approximately 50% of the teachers left after the principal's first year.
- Even though Northwood High School has had a consistent principal since it reopened, the difficulty with the phased reopening is the major reason for the highest teacher turnover rates in the county. Other reasons include adding a grade each year and the change from a 4x4 schedule to a modified 4x4. The teachers at Northwood teach six classes as opposed to other high school teachers in the county who teach five classes.

Ideas to Improve Retention

The following are ideas given to me by one community leader on how MCPS could improve retention among principals and teachers.

- Facility equity – Schools across the county need to have comparable facilities. Research has shown that the condition of schools is a major factor in teacher retention.
- Longevity bonus - Pay teachers a bonus for staying at highly impacted schools in excess of 5 years. Highly impacted schools can be defined as those having a certain FARMS rate (say 33%). An annual bonus of perhaps \$1000 or \$2000 would accrue for a teacher who stays at an impacted school. However the bonus would not be payable unless the teacher remained at the school five

years. Thus, after five years of teaching, a teacher would receive a lump sum payment of \$5000 to \$10,000. After another 5 years at the same school, another lump sum payment would be made.

- Housing subsidies—Much teacher turnover is a result of teachers living in other counties. For them, the commute to the down county is quite challenging. We could propose a housing subsidy for those teachers who choose to purchase homes near highly impacted schools in which they teach. The county would retain a lien on the property in the amount of the subsidy which would be repaid in the event the property was sold, or the teacher, after a stated number of years left the school. For example, if there were a new teacher at SSI who wanted to buy a house in Silver Spring, the county would contribute \$100,000 to the purchase of the house. If she sold the house, the county as a lien holder, just like a mortgage company, would be entitled to be repaid the \$100,000. There could be a phase-in, where after so many years of teaching, the subsidy is considered repaid.
- Subsidized child care-- Many teachers leave because of the expense and difficulty of arranging childcare. MCPS could locate a child care facility in some under utilized space in one of the schools. SSI parents worked on this project with Gary Miller at SSI, but had no support from the county. The idea is to have MCPS offer the space for free, as well as pay for insurance and equipment. Child care staff salaries could be paid out of the payments made by teachers using the center. The childcare would be conveniently located near the workplace and hopefully below market cost.

MCPS parents are very concerned with the problem of principal and teacher retention throughout the county. Due to the demographics of DCC schools, retention of quality principals and teachers is particularly important. When schools have a high turnover of principals, there is a lack of consistent leadership needed for stability and quality education for students. The inconsistent leadership in a school trickles down to higher teacher turnover rates that further affect community stability, productivity, efficiency, and most importantly student academic achievement. Montgomery County has been a state and nationwide leader on important educational initiatives. MCPS needs to take a step forward and be a leader by providing alternatives and incentives for increasing principal and teacher retention in county schools.

# Task Force to Improve our Schools

## Principal and Teacher/Staff Retention Survey

Name \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_ Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

**Principal Turnover:** Please write the principals' names who have led your school for the past ten years, school year 1997-98 to 2007-08. If you know what position the principal took or the reason he/she left, please provide that information and how did the school obtain (what process) the new (next) principal.

Principal's name	School years	Reason left	Process

**Teacher/Staff Turnover:** For the last five school years, please write how many staff have left your school, total number of staff that school year, and turnover percentage.

School year	# staff left	# total staff	Turnover percentage
2002-2003			
2003-2004			
2004-2005			
2005-2006			
2006-2007			

1. Please provide any stories or anecdotes about principal and staff retention and turnover, including stories about your school community's experience with the principal hiring process.
2. What are your ideas for principal and teacher/staff retention?
3. When principals did turnover, what was the school community's perception of why the principal left?

Please use another sheet or the back if you need.

Please e-mail your completed survey to [chambers-kowal@rcn.com](mailto:chambers-kowal@rcn.com) or mail it to Jennifer Chambers, 9510 Caroline Ave. Silver Spring, MD, 20901 by Sunday, October 7. Thank you.