

Written testimony of
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I would like to thank the Board for this opportunity to comment on the Strategic Plan and offer opinions as to how we, as a school system, can best serve our students in these difficult economic times.

When I entered the teaching profession 45 years ago, the one maxim that was almost universally accepted was that reducing class size was critical if we were to improve education. Many fads in education have come and gone in the last 45 years, but, as far as I can see, this is one tenet that has stood the test of time. Thus I believe that all efforts in these times of funding cutbacks must be focused on keeping teachers in the classroom – period.

Now I know in theory the MCPS administration agrees with this goal and claims that it has accomplished it over the years; unfortunately its past practice does not seem to support this. For example

- MCPS supposedly has a limit of 32 students in an academic class in high school, but this is frequently overridden. This hardly qualifies, even if adhered to, as smaller class size. When I started teaching, in a district not nearly as affluent as Montgomery County, the absolute maximum number of students in that system's high school classrooms was 30.
- But in its list of strategies implemented on page 34 of the Strategic Plan the claim is made that high schools in the DCC (including Blair) provide an average class size of 22 for academic classes in Grade 9. This would be progress, if it were true. Yet according to OASIS, the average number of students in US History this semester at Blair is 27.75 and the average number of students in 9th grade English is 25.
- Further, on the same page, the claim is made that adequate provision has been made to support special education students in inclusion classes. This is unfortunately not the case: for example two of the three 9th grade inclusion classes in English have the following numbers

Regular Ed	Special Ed
15	13
14	12

For Social Studies the numbers are similar. These large classes with a preponderance of special education students certainly do not serve the interests of our special education students.

My point here is simple; even with the very minor cuts to this year's budget staffing at Blair (and elsewhere) has already taken a big hit. While I don't expect the situation will get better, I and the teachers with whom I work are very concerned that the situation doesn't get worse.

Obviously, something needs to give. I have noticed that much of the focus of both the past and present strategic plans is on technology and the collection and monitoring of data. While I am a strong supporter of technology AS A TOOL for use in the classroom, it does not replace the teacher and the teacher's relationship with his or her students. And while data can sometimes inform our instruction, it can also obfuscate, and it is certainly of little value to a teacher overwhelmed with grading essays from 150+ students.

Almost 20 years ago, when faced with similar budget cuts, MCPS responded with major cuts in its administrative offices so that it could maintain the quality of instruction made possible by smaller class sizes. As a history teacher I strongly believe we should learn from history.