



Comments for Strategic Planning Forum
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Good evening. My name is Kay Romero. I am the President of the Montgomery County Council of PTAs. With more than 50,000 members, our mission is to promote the education and welfare of the children of Montgomery County. We thank you for this opportunity to talk about our priorities for MCPS in the immediate future, and for the 2009-2010 school year.

As we all know, Montgomery County is more diverse than the casual observer might understand. It includes, in addition to many wealthy families, many immigrant families, many families with very limited resources, many families with children who have special needs, and many children with extensive preparation, interests, abilities, and intellectual curiosity in diverse areas. For a significant portion of students, these categories overlap. **It is the great challenge of Montgomery County Public Schools to try to meet the needs of not just all, but EACH of these students.**

We recognize that this year and next are expected to be tight budget years. As we had for the past four summers, MCCPTA officers spent this summer meeting with local PTAs in each area of the County, finding out local priorities and issues.

Briefly, the most common themes mentioned in our meetings come under the categories of safety, staffing, curriculum, and parent community outreach. Obviously I can't address these concerns adequately in three minutes. So I'll hit the highlights:

Safety encompasses a wide range of issues - ranging from bullying and gang recruitment to building environments with adequate security and freedom from mold and other contaminants. Unfortunately for our kids, the services that address these issues are often the first to be frozen or cut in a budget crisis. We hope this will not be this case this year. We cannot sacrifice our kids' safety, security, or health to budget concerns.

Staffing and curriculum speak to reasonable class sizes, adequate staff training, and proper assignment of students. MCPS has made strides toward reducing class size over the past several years. The phasing out of learning centers and increased mainstreaming of children with special needs increases the need for small class sizes and more staff

training. Meeting the needs of more advanced students within heterogeneous classrooms also requires lower class sizes and more teacher training.

While we welcome the move to make sure accelerated instruction is available to all students, we have seen gaps in support for students and teachers in this area. Teachers need more supporting materials, lead time and training (not during school hours) to implement changes. Parents and students need more guidance in determining the best placement for each student, and more help when catch-up is necessary. We ask that you not make changes to curriculum and instruction without supporting them with additional staff, staff training, and student supports. If the budget will not allow you to implement a new program sensibly, reassess the speed of implementation. Look at the diverse needs of our students, and strive to address the needs of each student.

Perhaps most importantly, we want you to know that we know parents are critical to our kids' education. We need to improve the ability of these families to communicate with their own kids' schools. We'd like to see more emphasis on **two-way communication and parent involvement**.

Again, we appreciate this opportunity to comment. We stand ready and eager to be your partners in advancing our kids' education even in a challenging economic environment.