

Blair Cluster testimony on Middle School Achievement, BOE Forum, October 15, 2009

Good Evening, my name is Kelly Stanford. I am a co-cluster representative for Eastern Middle School. Tonight, I am speaking on behalf of Blair Cluster; specifically, our collective interest in middle school achievement.

First, kudos to the MCPS strategic plan which supports parental involvement. Parents and family are the keystone which support children's school success, no matter class size or budgets.

As a cluster, we wish you luck as you establish spending priorities. We hope you will consider the challenges faced by our most highly impacted middle schools and find a way to maintain or increase programs targeted to meet the achievement needs of all students within the cluster.

At this time, the middle schools of the Blair Cluster identify spending priorities as follows:

1. Staffing Allocations

In the most highly impacted middle schools, as measured by FARMS and mobility rates, we ask MCPS to consider revising staffing allocations to recognize the added educational load and support needed for students to achieve in classes and in tests such as the Algebra HSA. Equity is NOT treating everyone the same; it is recognizing and addressing the huge gaps in preparedness for higher-level instruction among students entering middle school. As the mobility rates in our schools show (Blair 12.7%, Eastern 13.3%, Silver Spring International 16%, Takoma Middle 10.7%), many of our students currently in secondary school were not in the county when they were young and did not receive the benefits of the K-2 reduced class size initiative.

Possible approaches could include smaller class sizes - e.g. 25:1 for Language Arts and Math instead of the across-the-board staffing formulas now in use - or an 8-period schedule with our teachers teaching 5 classes to enable them to support student achievement at all levels, most particularly those students who need additional support in both reading and math.

In recent years some of our schools have been fortunate to receive additional staffing allocations from our community superintendent for Academic Intervention. The budget cuts have all of us planning for less. We only ask that the reductions be proportional to need.

2. Academic Intervention/ Support Staff

Maintaining academic support and extended learning opportunities at school provides support where it is most needed – to at risk students. Resource teachers help provide students with additional support and extended learning opportunities in Math and Reading. Research shows that the more time students spend with subject matter in combination with smaller class sizes, student achievement improves. All students, but especially at-risk students, thrive when they expand the network of caring adults in their

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lives. We don't want to lose this important contribution to student success.

3. Fine Arts, P.E., Music, extra-curricular stipends and activity buses

A 21st century education can no longer be confined to traditional subject matter nor can it be bound to the classroom. First, if our students are to succeed, they must receive ample opportunities to demonstrate their leadership, talents, and gifts. For some of our students, school success comes only when it is tied to access to these other instructional areas. Second, extra-curricular stipends pay for teachers to stay after school and build relationships and tutor students. Third, activity buses provide a safe way back home after a longer school day.

Do you recall the man who made stone soup? He convinced others to contribute a little bit of this and a pinch of that, until everyone's contribution made a tasty soup that was much more than the sum of its parts. This year, the school system and the BOE have to make miracles with their stone soup recipe. Know that you can count on us to contribute what we can to make a tasty stone soup for everyone to share.

Thank you for all you do to help us help our kids succeed. Good luck.