



The Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations

Comments for Strategic Planning Forum Montgomery County Council of PTAs

September 17, 2009

Good evening. I am Kay Romero, President of the Montgomery County Council of PTAs. With more than 50,000 members, our mission is to advocate for the education and welfare of the children of Montgomery County. We appreciate this opportunity to tell you about our priorities for this year and next.

We recognize that funding for the next budget year is expected to be at least as scarce as this year. And this year's budget is already a bare bones budget. It's important that we keep our focus on the essentials.

MCCPTA officers spent this summer meeting with local PTAs in each area of the county, learning about local priorities and issues. Briefly, the most common themes mentioned in our meetings come under the categories of staffing and curriculum, safety and security, and meeting diverse needs appropriately. If my remarks sound familiar, it's because our priorities are consistent from year to year. The needs of our children are the same, and the need to focus funding in these areas continues. I can't address these concerns fully in three minutes, but I am here to give you the highlights.

It is the great challenge of Montgomery County Public Schools to try to meet the needs of not just all, but EACH of our students.

Concerns about staffing and curriculum speak to reasonable class sizes and adequate support for program initiatives. MCPS has made progress in reducing class size over the past several years, but other innovations seem to have outpaced this progress. The phasing-out of learning centers and increased mainstreaming of students increases the need for small class sizes and more staff training. Providing academic enrichment and acceleration within heterogeneous classrooms also requires lower class sizes and teacher training. We recognize that current budget constraints will limit class size reduction, but we urge you to keep class size at the forefront of your planning. And before you introduce major curriculum reforms, we urge you to consider whether you have the resources to support those reforms with the necessary staff, training, and educational materials. 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.

Parental concerns about **safety and security** encompass a wide range of issues - from bullying and gang recruitment to buildings with adequate security and freedom from mold and other contaminants. Buildings will not repair themselves and mold will not stop growing because there's a budget crisis. Gang recruitment, recess safety, and limited building access continue to be particular areas of concern. Unfortunately for our children, 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 the case this year. We cannot sacrifice our children's safety, security, or health to budget concerns.

Finally, we want you to know that we know parents are critical to our children's education. We'd like to see more emphasis on **two-way communication and parent involvement**. We appreciate the strides that have been made in keeping many MCPS parents informed of their children's progress through innovative electronic communications. We remain concerned that communication between home and school is particularly difficult for families where parents have limited English skills or limited computer access.

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

Thank You,

Kay Romero, President,
Montgomery County Council of PTAs