

# Letter from the Board of Education

March 1, 2008

The Honorable Isiah Leggett, County Executive  
The Honorable Michael Knapp, President,  
and Members of the County Council  
Montgomery County Government  
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Mr. Leggett, Mr. Knapp, and Council Members:

On behalf of the Montgomery County Board of Education, I am transmitting the Fiscal Year 2009 Operating Budget for the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). This budget builds on the many academic successes our students have achieved over the last eight years and provides the necessary resources we need in these austere times to continue our successful academic reforms. While we know that this is a difficult budget year, we strongly believe that this is not the time to retreat from the investments that have yielded such remarkable progress for our children.

The \$2.1 billion FY 2009 Operating Budget includes an increase of \$110 million over the FY 2008 budget, a 5.6 percent increase, excluding the county mandated contribution for future retiree health benefits. This is the lowest percentage increase since 1997. It funds the negotiated agreements with our employee associations and includes targeted investments to continue efforts to reform and improve middle schools, strengthen special education, improve high schools, and add more counselors and elementary assistant principals.

The majority of our budget pays for the talented and dedicated women and men who devote their lives to educating the young people of our community. The Board is proud of the strong positive relationship we have with employees and their associations, and we fully support the funding of the five percent wage increase.

We work diligently to ensure that our dollars are spent wisely and effectively. In fact, to fund our initiatives this year, we offset the roughly \$10 million in expenditures with a proportionate amount of cuts in other programs. We continue to devote nearly 80 cents of every dollar to instructional programs and central administrative costs remain among the lowest in the state for any school district at two percent.

Without a doubt, we believe the academic success of our students is a direct result of our community's investments over the last eight years. Consider our students' record of achievement:

- The Class of 2007 set numerous historic highs in participation and performance in Advanced Placement (AP) courses. The Class of 2007 broke the previous AP record set by last year's seniors with 60 percent of the class taking at least one AP exam and 46 percent scoring well enough to earn college credit.
- The performance of the Class of 2007 on AP exams was three times higher than the national average for 2007 graduates and more than twice as high as the average for graduating seniors in Maryland. African American and Hispanic students in MCPS outscored the national average for **all** students as well.
- *Newsweek* magazine once again ranked all 23 eligible high schools in the top 3 percent in the nation, including 5 in the top 100 and 4 in the top 70.
- 93 percent of kindergartners are reading simple text, and there is virtually no achievement gap in reading between White students and their African American and Hispanic peers.
- 56 percent of eighth graders completed Algebra 1 last year and 67 percent of this year's eighth grade class are enrolled in this gateway course.

The FY 2009 budget reflects significant community input and the participation of our parents and employee associations in the development of the budget. We held two exceptional community meetings in the fall where we received a great deal of parental and student feedback that helped us shape this budget. You will see their priorities reflected in our initiatives whether it's middle school reform or additional counselors or parent community coordinators. The Board and the superintendent are committed to continuing our efforts to increase parental involvement not only in the budget process but in the educational process as well. We want our parents to be true partners in the education of their children.

The Board did approve one amendment to the superintendent's proposed budget that underscores our focus on middle school reform; increasing the number of schools included in the initiative from nine to ten in the 2008–2009 school year. There are currently five middle schools in the first phase of middle school reform. The amendment didn't add any additional cost to the superintendent's budget because it offset the expense by not adding as many lunch hour aides as the superintendent had proposed.

Overall, middle school reform accounts for the majority of the \$10.2 million in initiatives in this budget. In addition to expanding the reform efforts to 10 schools, the \$5.3 million in the budget will assist us in developing 21 innovative courses in other middle schools and continuing the Middle School Magnet Consortium of Argyle, Parkland and Loiederman middle schools.

The remainder of the \$10.2 million in initiatives will provide \$1.5 million to expand the hours-based special education staffing model to three additional middle schools—for a total of 16 middle schools—and allow us to increase the number of elementary teachers for classes with large numbers of special education students.

The final \$3.4 million of the initiative plan will pay for 10 elementary assistant principals, six school counselors and six parent-community coordinators, the expansion of the Poolesville High School magnet to 11th grade, the addition of International Baccalaureate programs at Kennedy and Seneca Valley high schools, and the expansion of a program to help ESOL high school students who come to us with interrupted education.

Together, our investments along with the continued strong management of the school district will enable us to continue the extraordinary progress we have made together over the last eight years as we continue to focus on closing the achievement gap and raising academic achievement for all students. The Board looks forward to working with County Executive Leggett and with the County Council as you begin your budget deliberations for the FY 2009 budget. As always, we stand ready to assist in any way possible as we all work together for the benefit of our students in Montgomery County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nancy Navarro". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Nancy Navarro  
President

NN:mmg