

Comments Received via the Web

Q1 FAMILIARITY WITH STRATEGIC PLAN: very_familiar

Q2 HOW CAN WE COMMUNICATE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES MORE EFFECTIVELY:

Q3 SELECT A GOAL FOR COMMENT: Four

Q3B WHAT STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES ARE ON TARGET:

Q3C WHAT IS MISSING OR FALLING SHORT: Diversity training needs to be improved. I attended a county-wide training earlier this year and found it to be misleading and unhelpful.

Q4 IDENTIFIER: Parent

Q1 FAMILIARITY WITH STRATEGIC PLAN: very_familiar

Q2 HOW CAN WE COMMUNICATE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES MORE EFFECTIVELY:

Q3 SELECT A GOAL FOR COMMENT: Three

Q3B WHAT STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES ARE ON TARGET:

Q3C WHAT IS MISSING OR FALLING SHORT: Family/Community Involvement. Better access to teachers is needed as is a sense that MCPS wants genuine involvement, as distinct from a "rubber stamp" for MCPS approached, no matter how well-intentioned these approaches may be.

Q4 IDENTIFIER: Parent

Q1 FAMILIARITY WITH STRATEGIC PLAN: very_familiar

Q2 HOW CAN WE COMMUNICATE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES MORE EFFECTIVELY:

Q3A SELECT A GOAL FOR COMMENT: Two

Q3B WHAT STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES ARE ON TARGET:

Q3C WHAT IS MISSING OR FALLING SHORT: Curriculum and Instruction.
The elementary math curriculum is incomprehensible to many parents at my daughter's school, even parents with substantial post-secondary education. This makes it difficult for parents to be involved in their children's math education in almost every area -- from helping with/reviewing homework to providing other math supports.

Formative Assessments are not communicated regularly (and on a timely basis) to parents (nor are evaluative assessments, which MCPS has concluded are strong predictors of performance on the MSA and CTBS).

Reading Recovery at my daughter's school is understaffed and cannot (almost like ESOL) follow students who "graduate" from the program but who may need follow-on supports.

System of Shared Accountability . . . fails to communicate test data and analytical tools to parents on its Internet site, relying instead on the State site. This approach robs parents of any useful CTBS analyses and limits the MSA analyses as well.

Technology At my daughter's school, there has been NO improvement in the children's technology nor has there been any effort to close the "digital divide." (Our PTA has worked to publicize Blair HS's program, but on-site access is critical in this area.)

Data Warehouse . . . tis initiative has been little publicized and I have not heard of any effort to do outreach for the input of minority parents.

Q4 IDENTIFIER: Parent

Q1 FAMILIARITY WITH STRATEGIC PLAN: very_familiar

Q2 HOW CAN WE COMMUNICATE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES MORE EFFECTIVELY: Meetings at local schools, perhaps as part of regularly scheduled PTA or NAACP Parents Council meetings

Q3A SELECT A GOAL FOR COMMENT: One

Q3B WHAT STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES ARE ON TARGET:

Q3C WHAT IS MISSING OR FALLING SHORT: Early Success
No significant narrowing of the Achievement Gap between White students, on the one hand and African American and Hispanic students, on the other in two critical areas: percentage of "Advanced" scores by race and ethnicity at Downcounty title 1 elementary schools and persistent gender differences at the school level, and by race and ethnicity, at

my daughter's school. Similarly, admission to county-wide elementary school, middle school, and high school magnet programs continue to reflect the failure of MCPS to "Aim High."

Support Program Improvements

... are hard to discern at my daughter's school, especially with respect to Asian language minorities. For example, little information is provided in languages that the prents of these children can read.

Q4 IDENTIFIER: Parent

Q1 FAMILIARITY WITH STRATEGIC PLAN: somewhat_familiar

Q2 HOW CAN WE COMMUNICATE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES MORE EFFECTIVELY:

Q3A SELECT A GOAL FOR COMMENT: One

Q3 SELECT A GOAL FOR COMMENT: Four

Q3B WHAT STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES ARE ON TARGET:

Q3C WHAT IS MISSING OR FALLING SHORT: Attn: Dr. Marshall Spatz

I am sure that the Board of Education and Dr. Weast are aware that Montgomery County ranks at the bottom four school districts in the state of Maryland for placement rates of students in their neighborhood schools.

That is why it is vital that the initiatives that the Department of Special Education regarding these placement rates be supported. Furthermore, the recommendations from the MCPS Staffing Committee, which address these very issues of placement rates, be supported financially. There are too many children who are not able to attend their neighborhood schools because of the lack of teacher education, lack of supports and a lack of commitment by

MCPS. The commitment to least restrictive environment, a requirement in state and federal law, must be made by MCPS in its entirety, not just by the special education department. There needs to be a commitment to training

in addition to the commitment to neighborhood schools. Teachers will require ongoing professional development in the areas of curriculum modifications, adaptations as well as differentiated instruction. This training is required by all general education teachers who will teach students with diverse needs in their classroom. Special education teachers as well as general education teachers will require time for collaborative planning in order to facilitate success for all students.

Thank you.

Q4 IDENTIFIER: Parent

Q1 FAMILIARITY WITH STRATEGIC PLAN: somewhat_familiar

Q2 HOW CAN WE COMMUNICATE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES MORE EFFECTIVELY:

Q3B WHAT STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES ARE ON TARGET:

Q3C WHAT IS MISSING OR FALLING SHORT: Though I am unable to attend forums in the evenings, I wanted to make sure my voice was heard in regards to the large class size issue. It is clear to me after volunteering several times in my daughters kindergarten class at Beverly Farms that a full time aid is needed in her class. Though the class sizes not above the guidelines, they are too large for one teacher to give the attention to each student that is needed. Not only is it difficult on the student, but it must also be stressful for the teachers. I hate to think that good teachers may leave because they are over worked. Ms. Mason is doing a wonderful job with her kindergarten class though she clearly needs help from the county on a day to day basis. Currently she has been receiving a good response from the parents as far as volunteering goes, but she should not have to rely on the parents for help. The parent classroom help should be in addition to the standard number of teachers in the class. I think you should either split the classes up and make a fourth kindergarten class or add aids to all three classes. Anyway, these are my thoughts. I don't have time to respond to all of the questions above. If you wish to contact me, please call me at my home number. (301)983-0557

Regard,
Meghan Smith

Q4 IDENTIFIER: Parent

Q1 FAMILIARITY WITH STRATEGIC PLAN: very_familiar

Q2 HOW CAN WE COMMUNICATE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES MORE EFFECTIVELY: you're doing a fine job in this area of communicating to the community!

Q3 SELECT A GOAL FOR COMMENT: Four

Q3B WHAT STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES ARE ON TARGET:

Q3C WHAT IS MISSING OR FALLING SHORT: INCENTIVES FOR TEACHERS IN HIGH POVERTY AND HIGH MINORITY SCHOOLS!!!!!!!! NOT JUST SCHOOLS LABELED "TITLE 1" Why would any teacher stay at one of this more challenging

schools, where teaching is much harder when they can go to an "easier" school for the same amount of money and less hassle especially with all the focus on teacher quality via student achievement??????????

Q4 IDENTIFIER: Parent

Q1 FAMILIARITY WITH STRATEGIC PLAN: very_familiar

Q2 HOW CAN WE COMMUNICATE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES MORE EFFECTIVELY: See item 3c for comment.

Q3A SELECT A GOAL FOR COMMENT: Two

Q3B WHAT STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES ARE ON TARGET:

Q3C WHAT IS MISSING OR FALLING SHORT: Regarding Goal 2 of the Strategic Plan, I strongly suggest the addition of school aides at Beverly Farms ES. Class size has significantly increased. So too have taxes increased, and as a resident in the Regency Estates community of Potomac, I would like to see greater attention given to our young students at Beverly Farms.

Just yesterday I volunteered in my son's kindergarten classroom. Class size in his classroom and each of the other kindergarten classes has gone from 18 to 25 students. Though I was truly amazed at veteran teacher Diane Golden's ability to work with a small group of students while others groups moved through "centers", I was very much aware of the absolute need for an aide in my son's classroom. Parental support through classroom volunteerism is a positive aspect in our Beverly Farms ES community, but it is not enough. Surely it is known that young children benefit from additional one-to-one instruction from professionals.

I must also voice my concern in combination with the half-day kindergarten program at Beverly Farms ES. In order for my child to attend a full-day program with afternoon learning (as children who attend full-day kindergarten do), I must pay approximately \$4500 to supplement a kindergarten complement program. Again, as a resident of Montgomery County, I have had to pay higher taxes in this community, and now I must pay out of pocket for the complement program when other children are able to benefit from FULL-DAY kindergarten learning. ALL of our young children need full-day programs, and it is unfair to make this discrimination without giving Beverly Farms ES much-needed aides in classrooms.

Q4 IDENTIFIER: Parent

Q1 FAMILIARITY WITH STRATEGIC PLAN: not_familiar

Q2 HOW CAN WE COMMUNICATE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES MORE EFFECTIVELY:

Q3 SELECT A GOAL FOR COMMENT: Three

Q3B WHAT STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES ARE ON TARGET: I think I picked the right goal - anyway - definitely more work on providing information to non-English speaking parents. We just had a back to school night with an extremely helpful video on the change in the grading system, and we want to make that information available to non-native speakers in our school community. Anything that could be done to facilitate the ease of providing translations would be invaluable.

Q3C WHAT IS MISSING OR FALLING SHORT:

Q4 IDENTIFIER: Parent

Q1 FAMILIARITY WITH STRATEGIC PLAN: somewhat_familiar

Q2 HOW CAN WE COMMUNICATE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES MORE EFFECTIVELY: Hold meetings by topic in local middle/high schools within the Blair cluster.

Q3A SELECT A GOAL FOR COMMENT: One

Q3B WHAT STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES ARE ON TARGET: Middle school audit; funding for after-school program coordinators; programs that help low-achieving students make the necessary large gains

Q3C WHAT IS MISSING OR FALLING SHORT: Reduced class size or additional instructional support for grades 3-8 to continue the gains made in grades K-2.

Q4 IDENTIFIER: Parent

Q1 FAMILIARITY WITH STRATEGIC PLAN: somewhat_familiar

Q2 HOW CAN WE COMMUNICATE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES MORE EFFECTIVELY: I feel you all are doing just about everything you can. Putting it on tv and sending home info with the kids.

Q3B WHAT STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES ARE ON TARGET: We pay a lot of taxes to live in potomac and our classe sizes at Beverly Farms are way to high. What are

the plans? If we cant add more teachers we need to add some more aids. To succed we need smaller classes or more help in each.

Q3C WHAT IS MISSING OR FALLING SHORT: The arts program.

Q4 IDENTIFIER: Parent

Q1 FAMILIARITY WITH STRATEGIC PLAN: not_familiar

Q2 HOW CAN WE COMMUNICATE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES MORE EFFECTIVELY: school handouts

Q3A SELECT A GOAL FOR COMMENT: One

Q3B WHAT STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES ARE ON TARGET:

Q3C WHAT IS MISSING OR FALLING SHORT: My son is a kindergartener at Beverly Farms Elementary and I am absolutely appauled by what I see occurring. He is in a half day kindergarten with 25 children. The same teacher teaches a second class of 25 children the other half of the day, for a total of 50 kindergarteners a day. It is nice that you've set targets for certain, I assume more needy, schools, but how can our children be expected to be able to learn the same material in half the amount of time with nearly twice the number of children? How can children so young be expected to learn in such large classes with only one teacher? How can a teacher be expected to teach such a large class without an assistant? I understand that it only gets worse in 1st grade. To add to the insult, we will be one of the last in the county going going full day (not scheduled until 2007/2008 year). We certainly are not the most affluent school in our cluster, so I am baffled by this decision. Please look at the problem of ridiculously large class sizes in schools other than the "targeted" schools.

Q4 IDENTIFIER: Parent

Q1 FAMILIARITY WITH STRATEGIC PLAN: not_familiar

Q2 HOW CAN WE COMMUNICATE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES MORE EFFECTIVELY: Newsletters to the community and through backpack mail.

Q3A SELECT A GOAL FOR COMMENT: Two

Q3B WHAT STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES ARE ON TARGET: I feel the concentration on math and reading is taking away the other subjects as science and social studies. Why not apply these subjects into the reading curriculum without taking away those subjects?

Q3C WHAT IS MISSING OR FALLING SHORT: The schools are growing with more portable each year. Why can't we concentrate on the the size of the classrooms and also the curriculum

Q4 IDENTIFIER: Parent

Please incorporate into the comments/testimony made on the Strategic Plan.
Thanks, roz

Sent: Tuesday, September 14, 2004 12:00 PM
Subject: MCPS strategic plan and operating budget

In response to the MCPS call for comments on the strategic plan and operating budget, I am writing to express my concern over the increasing number of children being placed in already crowded classes.

I am the parent of two children at Wood Acres Elementary School, which has seen explosive growth since its renovation two years ago. Our enrollment is at capacity this year, indicating children will be in portable classrooms next year. With the rollout of full-day kindergarten in 2007, even more children will be pushed out into these temporary buildings. The size of the lot on which Wood Acres is located is among the smallest in the county, with very little outdoor play space for the children. The portables will eat into that already limited space, leaving much less room for important physical activity by an increasing number of children.

When Wood Acres welcomed the Learning and Academically Disabled children in our cluster a few years ago, we did so with the understanding that MCPS resources would be available to support these children. Calculating class sizes without accounting for mainstreaming these children into each grade presents an inaccurate picture and negatively impacts all the children. Class sizes must take into account all the students, teachers, and aides, and all necessary physical equipment and space.

More children attending our school, more children in each classroom, less space in each classroom to move about and learn, less space outdoors to play, all adds up to an unacceptable situation at what should be a school MCPS points to with pride.

Now add in the new reading and math curricula, the layers of new testing, the Baldrige philosophy and related record-keeping, and I cannot fathom how teachers are going to do their jobs. How can an elementary school teacher instruct 30 students in basic reading and math in these conditions? How can we as parents hope that these conditions allow our children to learn at the levels we expected when we moved into this county and agreed to pay the associated taxes? We chose this elementary school, in this cluster, because we believed it would provide the best public education possible for our children. If MCPS lessens the quality of instruction by adding more children and providing fewer resources and less space, then our family will not be alone in reconsidering whether we should choose another place to educate our children.

This combination of circumstances can be fixed by limiting the number of students in each class, counting ALL students (including LAD) in that number, and providing adequate resources for the schools to house and educate them. If the County hopes to continue attracting businesses and taxpayers, they should recognize that providing a truly top-notch public education system is the highest priority.

Q1 FAMILIARITY WITH STRATEGIC PLAN: very_familiar

Q2 HOW CAN WE COMMUNICATE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES MORE EFFECTIVELY: Describe them more simply with less educational jargon.

Q3A SELECT A GOAL FOR COMMENT: One

Q3B WHAT STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES ARE ON TARGET: Full day kindergarten, reading interventions (balanced literacy), HS signature programs

Q3C WHAT IS MISSING OR FALLING SHORT: A smaller size class with a weaker teacher is not of benefit to students. The district has fallen far short in providing good, experienced teachers to the schools in the eastern part of the county. These schools with greater needs are the training ground for new teachers who then transfer out after several years- just as they are becoming good. The schools in Rockville are now quite balanced - economically and ethnically-- but unless the district does a better job of providing challenging instruction to the average and high students- instead of only focusing on the lowest ones-- the middle class parents will leave the schools and then the downward spiral will begin. These elementary schools need teachers who know how to effectively differentiate instruction and meet the needs of a wide range of students-- and most beginning teachers are not yet proficient in this.

ESOL programs should be more integrated with regular classroom instruction and pull out programs should be used only for students with very limited English. All teachers

should receive professional development so they are able to effectively teach ESOL students within the regular program - particularly as students who've achieved speaking fluency need additional support for reading and writing in English.

The term "red zone schools" is offensive and should not be used.

Q4 IDENTIFIER: County_Resident

Q1 FAMILIARITY WITH STRATEGIC PLAN: very_familiar

Q2 HOW CAN WE COMMUNICATE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES MORE EFFECTIVELY:

Q3A SELECT A GOAL FOR COMMENT: One

Q3B WHAT STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES ARE ON TARGET: None are on target for meeting the needs of kids with Autism Spectrum type disorder. Because of the rigid delimitation between Diploma and Certificate... The kids that need some services from each are left floundering and come out of MCPS with less skills than what they need. MCPS goals are entirely academic and need to focus on those kids that are not college bound as well.

Q3C WHAT IS MISSING OR FALLING SHORT: transition support (\$0.1 m) is far too little to spend. We have been working on special education services for our son for 18 years and MCPS has fallen short of providing the supports that our son now. Making it worse are the lack of transition support and lack of knowledge of what is out there for kids in the Autism Spectrum. NOT only is he unprepared to go out into the world... we are also faced with the lack of supports once our son goes out as a young adult. Much more needs to be spent on training staff about transition support as well as informing parents what is out there and how to get those services as well as helping the kids be better prepared.

Q4 IDENTIFIER: Parent

Q1 FAMILIARITY WITH STRATEGIC PLAN: very_familiar

Q2 HOW CAN WE COMMUNICATE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES MORE EFFECTIVELY:

Q3A SELECT A GOAL FOR COMMENT: One

Q3B WHAT STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES ARE ON TARGET:

Q3C WHAT IS MISSING OR FALLING SHORT: Special Education Improvements. I see little improvement in services for kids with Autism Spectrum in the 15 years we have been working to get services for our son. My son has been in an ED program which does not fully meet our son's needs for the last 5 but was better than other things MCPS. The only better choice was to go to a program at Kennedy Krieger which is an hour and half commute each way. The problem with services for the Autism Spectrum kids is the rigidity between the Diploma and Certificate track. Kids on the Diploma track can not get living skills, job supports while kids on Certificate track are limited to a third grade education. Also transition support services need more money, more staff, and more training. These kids are surely being left behind and MCPS is not meeting the goal of NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND! The real test of an excellent school system is how well it handles its most needy kids. If MCPS can help kids with Autism Spectrum Disorder be successful that is a true measure of a great school system.

Q4 IDENTIFIER: Parent