

**Montgomery County Public Schools
Community Forum
Rockville High School
September 8, 2005**

Summary of Participants' Input

The questions posed for each topic were:

- What strategies and initiatives are on target to achieve the goals?
- What is missing or falling short?
- How can we communicate the goals and objectives of the strategic plan more effectively to the community?
- What are three major points to take from the discussion to the MCPS community?

Topic A: Early Success and Class Size Reduction

- Open enrollment to preschool regardless of income
- Kindergarten class size—15
- Full day K is good
- Need for ESOL kindergarten
- Need for translation services at PTA meetings
- Need ESOL teacher who speaks Vietnamese
- Translations are taking too long
 - Increase budget for translations
- More sections to be offered within a subject area
- All components in Topic A are working well
- Full day K—pluses
 - Safe place for students
 - Working parents benefit
 - FARMS
 - Social and academic skills
- Parent training (specifically Title 1 school children not on same level)
 - Strategies for parents
 - Know school system (orientation day)
- Closing “knowledge & information” gap
 - Multiple opportunities for parent training
 - Promotion of programs that exist
- Class Size Reduction
 - Support expenditures and budget
 - 3rd grade—dramatic increase in size (possible small group instruction for teachers to perform)
- Teachers need flexibility, multi-age classrooms over other options (differentiated instruction), money directed to end combo classes could be better used
- Class size reduction=less PE & arts (fewer minutes PE) (not enough/matching in dollars)
- Class size info (specifics) not available, ratios do not match rhetoric
- Combining classes presents challenges (safety, child-teacher interaction)

- Parent involvement—MCPS better at soliciting input than disseminating info
- Transparency should be a goal with parent involvement
- 2nd→3rd grade transition should have additional support
- County could explore expansion of resources through other means (i.e., instruments through donation)
- Class size reductions are a positive transition; technology and space have not been adequate
- Narrowing the achievement gap by continuing to focus on preK, head start
- Teacher quality and support for teachers must be addressed
- Student in K, parent feels good about the services received for speech delay of student
- Daughter in K—language, speech therapist, speech delays, recommending specialists (psychological, psychiatric, developmental) but she doesn't feel she has the resources to find the specialists, parents would rather see how child would develop without medicines recommended by specialists. What is happening in school is good but.....
- Two kids—one high school and one middle school thought tonight was open house/back-to-school night.
- I didn't understand the system or the report cards/child was getting As but she didn't know she was “below grade level.” Got child into high-level classes, asked for child to move up. Transition was difficult, even though I spoke English and could advocate.
- Hard for parents to come to meetings. We are cooking, cleaning, working, but it helps when we do come to meetings.
- Elements of Early Success Plan are making progress
- Pre-K services not fully utilized
- Reduce class size in all grades and increase allocation of specialties
- On target for full day Kindergarten having a plus (+) effect on student achievement
- Title I schools are making AYP
- Pre-K enrollment low
- Parents do not understand importance of kindergarten curriculum, high absences
- School leaders communicate strategic plan with staff
- Smaller class size in primary grades, grades 3, 4, and 5 impacted by larger class size
- Significantly reduce class size in secondary schools
- Reduce class size, create administrative duties

Topic B: Students with Special Needs

- More ESOL counselors who speak Vietnamese/Bilingual
- More ESOL/Bilingual parent coordinators (currently one 2 staff members who speak Vietnamese)
- Notes from classes/documents need to be translated
- Activities/programs that encourage ESOL student to come together/prevent isolation
- Perception that ESOL budget has been cut
- Increase community awareness of services the county provides to students with special needs, students in GT and low-income families
- More budget and more attention to bully issue/safety and security/entering and exiting building
- Special Education
 - Class size reduction—placement of students with special needs (priority)
 - Special education should have access to general education
- ESOL
 - Parent outreach
 - Workshops by language
 - Expand study circles
- Services for gifted and talented
 - More information for parents
 - All subject areas at middle school level
- AP requirements not meeting all children's needs, they can get in the way of other priorities, i.e., study time, extra-curricular
- Least restrictive environment misdefinition, not implementing policies that address student level on continuum
- Achievement gap/success rate for all students to succeed
- Communication/translation, should be consistent and high-quality
- Abolishing non-rigorous classes should be reconsidered. Rigor to be determined by student needs
- Systemic approach to ensuring representation of all student groups in Gifted & Talented
- ESOL students do not get enough support with reading and writing. Teachers should have increased professional development to support students beyond spoken fluency
- Perceived value of AP coursework—*What is it preparing students for?
- Professional development, individualizing for all children
- Progression of curriculum content. *Offering high-quality programming across the board, failure to do this pushes students to seek alternate programs
- Family relationships need to be nurtured, parents should understand all options. A “guiding” process to explain options introduced.
- An increase of high-quality paraeducators to support teaching & learning. More trained staff.
- Importance is not placed equally on all subjects, allowing student interest to drive planning
- Fewer barriers to AP enrollment
- PE missing in educational process. Respond to MCPTA resolutions on physical activity

- How to nurture student investment in learning, how to meet all children's needs using a team approach (overcoming miscommunication. Meet children's developmental needs
- Language access—worried no way for school to communicate with parents regarding special education student needs and in the curriculum wants to help child at home but no one can explain now what her child is being taught. Wants someone to come to her home. Wants to communicate but doesn't speak the language. Would like to see objectives of family and school are communicated together for the child. Would like to meet more often with teachers to talk regarding progress
- In down county Tier I & II ESOL major problem—Immediate rebuttal with office staff. There should be a way to know that there is a Spanish-speaking parent and the school should reach out to them in their own language. The responsibility should not have to be on the parent
- ELO—what are the results? Haven't seen results
- Lack of guidance counselors. What is the appropriate ratio? Guidance counselors can articulate a plan to the parent, problem exacerbate because of language
- Mainstreaming
- Additional staff training to meet student needs (accommodations)
- Over identification of students (African-American male students)
- Curriculum alignment with content and staff training for implementation
- Allocations of funding
- Second middle school ctr (upcounty) opened
- Middle school magnet consortium
- Inclusion of all students to participate in Honors, AP courses

OTHER FEEDBACK

- Communication
- Last years budget results
- Coordination
- We knew there would be conflicts with back-to-school night in advance
- Barriers to Learning →Training front office staff, not just Spanish and English, there are French speaking immigrants too
- Continue to have meetings, parent outreach coordinators at school every day. Need regular meetings where parents can come and talk to principal
- Need to explain levels to parents
- PreK staff home visits→working communication with high school gets harder, elementary school was easy, middle school was harder. They lose the parents as our kids grow older
- Communication Gaps
- Parental Engagement/Outreach
- Access to services
- Language access
- Parent/Community Coordinators
- Allocations for specialists in elementary schools
- School safety
- Student services and mental health

- Lack of counseling services
- Partnerships
- Web enhancement-disparity among schools; assignments posted
- Curriculum; instruction
- Advisory committee
- Need MORE parent representation
- Parent outreach-avenue
 - →principals (contact), suggest certain parents, reach through phone; get a diverse group of parents
- Technology for Curriculum Mastery (TCM)
- Extended day and extended year programs
- Reach out to students as well as parents
- School improvement plans posted
- Three (3) things to be shared
 - Parent outreach
 - Closing knowledge and information gap (parents and community)
 - Class size reduction
- Special ed/staffing
- Title 1

KEY POINTS

Three Key Points

1. Continued work on early success and class size reduction and address ripple effect
2. Defining success & rigor student-by-student, individualizing and meeting student needs
3. Reality in classrooms to match rhetoric in strategic plan