

APPROVED  
23-1996

Rockville, Maryland  
May 20, 1996

The Board of Education of Montgomery County met in special session at the Carver Educational Services Center, Rockville, Maryland, on Monday, May 20, 1996, at 7:40 p.m.

ROLL CALL Present: Ms. Ana Sol Gutiérrez, President  
in the Chair  
Mr. Stephen Abrams  
Dr. Alan Cheung  
Mr. Blair G. Ewing  
Mrs. Beatrice B. Gordon  
Mrs. Nancy King  
Mr. Charles McCullough  
Ms. Rachel Prager, Student Board Member-Elect

Absent: Mr. Reginald Felton

Others Present: Dr. Paul L. Vance, Superintendent  
Mrs. Katheryn W. Gemberling, Deputy  
Mr. Larry A. Bowers, Acting Deputy

Re: **ANNOUNCEMENT**

Ms. Gutiérrez announced that Mr. Felton was out of town, and Mr. McCullough was not currently present at the table.

RESOLUTION NO. 350-1996 Re: **BOARD AGENDA**

On recommendation of the superintendent and on motion of Mrs. Gordon seconded by Dr. Cheung, the following resolution was adopted unanimously by members present:

Resolved, That the Board of Education adopted its agenda for May 20, 1996.

RESOLUTION NO. 351-1996 Re: **RESOLUTION HONORING SHARON FRIEDMAN**

On recommendation of Ms. Gutiérrez and on motion of Dr. Cheung seconded by Mrs. Gordon, the following resolution was adopted unanimously by members present:

WHEREAS, On February 23, 1993, the formation of the Montgomery County Alliance for Educational Excellence (Alliance) was announced, committed to being an independent voice to mobilize broad-based community support to raise the quality of public education in Montgomery County; and

WHEREAS, The Alliance wisely chose, as its first President, Sharon Friedman, who at that time was the President of the Montgomery County Council of PTAs in which position she had distinguished herself; and

WHEREAS, Under Sharon Friedman's inspired leadership, the Alliance came to be well respected among the entire community and within government circles as an unyielding advocate for public education while remaining a constructive critic of the school system when warranted; and

WHEREAS, The Alliance, during Sharon Friedman's tenure as President, among many other endeavors initiated the School-Community Partnerships Clearinghouse database (in tandem with the Department of Libraries and MCPS); published the Eye on Education, a newsletter to keep supporters of public education informed; took the leadership in harnessing the County's citizens and officials to defeat the proposals of the Governor's Commission on School Funding (Hutchinson Commission); advocated tirelessly for increases in school construction monies; conducted two annual forums; published and widely disseminated a Blueprint for Action addressing such critical issues as management, accountability, and long-range strategic planning; began annual business-school partnership awards luncheons; and commenced a series of roundtable discussions on such topics as the respective roles of the various branches of government in school budget issues, and the linking of education and social services; and

WHEREAS, Sharon Friedman is stepping down as president of the Alliance to assume her new responsibilities as Executive Director of the Montgomery County Mental Health Association; and

WHEREAS, Sharon Friedman is being recognized at the Alliance's luncheon of May 28, 1996 with a special tribute; now therefore be it

Resolved, That the Montgomery County Board of Education and superintendent of schools applaud the unstinting commitment of Sharon Friedman to advance the cause of public education in Montgomery County and recognizes the numerous accomplishments that remain as the testament to her hard work; and be it further

Resolved, That the Montgomery County Board of Education and superintendent of schools extend their gratitude to Sharon Friedman for her efforts and successes during her three years as President of the Alliance; and be it further

Resolved, That the Montgomery County Board of Education and superintendent of schools offer their best wishes to Sharon Friedman as she embarks on a new chapter of her life where she will continue to advocate for the needs of children.

Re: **STRATEGIES FOR MORE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

Ms. Gutiérrez explained that this meeting was one of the Board's action areas, and it will be an open discussion. She introduced Mr. Tom Denne, county executive's office; Ms. Kristin Warren, producer of Cable 55; Ms. Luella Mast, MCCPTA president; Dr. James Robinson; and Dr. Alvin Roberts, NAACP.

Dr. Vance highlighted data from the white paper that included quantity of official correspondence, strategies of individual schools, new and emerging technologies, cable television, publications and videotapes, news media, commercial television and radio public affairs programs, marketing, business and community outreach, and internal communications. The school system's efforts, thus far provide an excellent base on which to build. MCPS' ability to provide the necessary resources for a meaningful expansion and enhancement of these efforts should be examined and discussed.

Dr. Vance named the following participants in the upcoming discussion: Mr. Larry Bowers, acting deputy superintendent for Planning, Technology and Supporting Services; Mrs. Katheryn W. Gemberling, deputy superintendent for Instruction; Dr. Hiawatha B. Fountain, associate superintendent for Pupil and Community Services; Dr. Joseph S. Villani, acting associate superintendent for Global Access; Mr. Brian Porter, director of the Department of Information; Ms. Eileen Cahill, director of Corporate Affairs and Marketing for Holy Cross Hospital and president-elect of the Montgomery Chamber of Commerce; Mr. David Edgerly, director of the Montgomery County Government, Office of Economic Development; and Mrs. Sharon Friedman, president of the Alliance for Educational excellence and the newly selected executive director of the Montgomery County Mental Health Association.

Mrs. Gemberling emphasized the main findings in the Department of Educational Accountability's survey of elementary students as parents expressed their satisfaction with MCPS. Overall, both students and parents were highly satisfied with MCPS especially in the areas of academic instruction, school climate, school-parent communication, student recognition, safety, empowerment of parents, and parent participation. This satisfaction represents the 25 percent of Montgomery County adults who have school-aged children; therefore, 75 percent of the adults in Montgomery County do not have direct knowledge of the schools. The challenge is to find a way to share this information and communicate beyond the schools to the taxpayers of Montgomery County.

Mr. Porter reported that the ability of the school system to explain itself well (to the point of considering formal marketing techniques and strategies) has become increasingly important in an era in which many communication efforts from so many sources compete for the public's attention. The school system's efforts -- from encouraging news media

coverage to responding to thousands of letters, disseminating hundreds of reports, updates and summaries, answering hundreds of daily telephone inquiries, attending dozens of nightly and weekend meetings throughout the county, and responding to requests for personal time and discussion -- reflect the inherent communication responsibilities of one of the nation's largest school systems. In preparing for this discussion, the superintendent and executive staff looked at current strategies, strategies of individual schools, new and emerging technologies, cable television, publications and videotapes, news media, commercial television and radio public affairs programs, marketing, business and community outreach, and internal communications. When reviewing strategies for more effective communication, there must be an acknowledgment of the reduction of a significant portion of administrative staff that continues to have a negative effect on the ability to maintain adequate contact with key constituents. Last year, communications were enhanced with the reorganization of the Board Office and the creation of the offices for Pupil and Community Services and Global Access and Technology.

\* Mr. McCullough joined the meeting at this time.

Ms. Cahill supports the Board's effort to communicate its mission, success, and challenges to the broader community. While it is important for MCPS to communicate with the parents of school children, other segments of the community have a vested interest in student output. Considering the fact that only 25 percent of county families have children attending public schools, 50 percent of the county's budget supports public education. The Board of Education and MCPS have both an obligation and the responsibility to all taxpayers for a regular accounting of academic performance. The Chamber recognizes the challenges to the school system, changing demographics, technology, and expectations, among others. As customers of education, the business community must have and deserves to have a better understanding of MCPS. To offset any negative perception about education, MCPS must collectively convey its messages to the community in concise and focused messages through a variety of methods. Messages should not only convey successes but challenges as well. MCPS must be candid about its shortcomings. If the community knows only half the story, it is still misinformed and there can be no constructive solutions to support for the school budget.

Mr. Edgerly stated that there was a time in Montgomery County when marketing and public relations were not necessarily the highest goals. It is in everyone's interest that the messages of viability and identity as well as relate what the county is doing internally and externally. Education and economic development exist in a harmonious and symbiotic relationship. Without the quality education from MCPS, the business climate cannot be maintained. The County Council has adopted a significant marketing initiative, but it cannot exist in a vacuum and there is a need to link with the Chamber of Commerce, MCPS, and Montgomery Collage as well as other stakeholders to establish a unified identity for Montgomery County. Nine basic areas have been identified some of which are

the needs for business retention and expansion, marketing business climate issues and economic forces, major project initiatives (conference center and other public investment), small business development, technology, agriculture, economic development fund, and education. He would be happy to work with the Board in outreach and public relations.

Mrs. Friedman emphasized that linkages in terms of communication for the school system are key. Alliances with community leaders work in getting the word out about the necessity for the greater constituency to become involved in education. Key constituent leaders can be educated through a briefing and their individual interests linked to the public schools. Once key leaders are formed, that group can be used for a variety of issues. At the present time, there are two levels of communications -- central administration and the local schools. There are numerous business/education partnerships within the local schools. Some principals do a good job of letting the business partners know what is available to them at and through the school. Her suggestion was to locate those principals who have developed a successful strategy for business/education outreach and that can be shared throughout MCPS.

\* Mr. Abrams left the meeting at this point.

Mrs. Gordon thanked everyone for the presentations as well as the material supplied to the Board. The Board needs to keep in mind that the most effective communication is two way. Another important piece is how the school system receives information as to impressions and suggestions from constituents as well as the broader community. The Board has begun to do that with a number of initiatives evidenced by the reorganization of the Board office and the designated a staff position for communications. The partnerships will help the Board learn about community concerns as well as reactions to policy and priorities of the Board.

Dr. Cheung expressed his appreciation for the information presented to the Board. In developing methods and strategies for two-way communication, MCPS must determine the audience as well as feedback components especially for the 75 percent without school-aged children in Montgomery County. One approach would be marketing the school system beyond the traditional as Ms. Cahill suggested. It seemed to him that there could be different strategies for letting people know what is going on, getting feedback and input, or asking for action or reaction. The school system needs to challenge the private sector and the 75 percent to help MCPS with strategic community initiatives. Likewise, the principals could invite the public with a strategic plan to become involved within their schools. Dr. Cheung thought that "blurbs" prepared for community newspapers and newsletters would reach a wide circulation within Montgomery County. Another concept is to encourage MCPS staff to publish locally developed materials since there are many successes with the school system. Some papers could be published in conjunction with corporate partners.

Mrs. King remembered that a year ago the Board informally talked about proclaiming the successes the school system, and this year the system has done a good job of doing just that. The 75 percent of the community who do not have school-aged children needs to read about and see the successes with the school system. She liked Ms. Friedman's concept of working with community leaders to educate the broader community.

Mr. Ewing thought the white papers and the comments were very useful. The school system communicates extensively and effectively with parents. The survey research that has been published regarding the public's willingness to support public education also makes that point. The system needs a single strategy to encompass the multiple strategies in place at the present. The issue is to address the purpose of the school system's communication in order to inform, explain, respond, account for results, assist in problem resolution, persuade and advocate, listen to public views, and reflect. Given the shortage of resources available within the system and to be more effective, the Board needs a strategy this is coherent and comprehensive, takes account of all the things that need to be done, sets targets, has a focus, has specific messages with substance, and measures of effectiveness. There also needs to be a distinction drawn between MCPS national education trends. If Montgomery County residents read about failing standards nationally, they will conclude MCPS is the same. The strategy that is developed has to be creditable reporting both strengths and weaknesses. The school system needs external validators who will say positive things about public education in Montgomery County. Similarly, the school system must listen to its external critics, and respond to their concerns.

Mr. Ewing opined that the strategic plan should pick certain functions to concentrate on such as informing and explaining. He agreed with Ms. Cahill about the obligation of the school system to account for results more systematically, more understandably, more simply, and more frequently. Also, the school systems needs to persuade and advocate. If there was a focus on those three areas -- informing and explaining, accounting for results, and persuading and advocating -- the school system would benefit immensely. MCPS already targets certain audiences -- parents, county and state government, county business and industry, community, and the media. There are other audiences such as employees as well as the poor and speakers of other languages whose population is not always organized. When Ms. Friedman spoke of working with the leadership community, it is critical that the school system continues and expands communicating with these leaders as well as determining what each group wants to know. The key is to have a strategy that deals with of these issues with credibility and focus.

Mr. McCullough brought up two points: (1) the targeted audience, and (2) student activities broadcast on cable television. He felt that students are not well informed about policy and curriculum matters. This could be addressed with supplying editors of students newspapers with press releases. Cable television could be used to broadcast success stories of the school system, and televise student activities and performances.

Ms. Gutiérrez was delighted with the input from staff because it put different mechanisms for communicating into categories, media, and audiences. Her concern was how effective the school system's communications are and can that effectiveness be assessed. She agreed with Mr. Ewing that there needs to be a strategic plan or initiative in which all activities can be brought together within a conceptual framework. Areas for communication are: (1) basic operation of the school system shared with parents, students, and staff; (2) accountability reporting to taxpayers; and (3) responding to the misinformation or misconceptions about the school system or Board actions.

Ms. Gutiérrez stated that there is a need for goals and objectives in order for communication efforts to be evaluated for effectiveness especially in light of declining funding where there can be no additions but a refocusing and prioritizing of resources. The most important part of a strategic plan would provide a mechanism for assessment and feedback to determine effectiveness and efficiency of MCPS communications. Finally, she asked if a policy supporting a total communication strategy defining a systematic approach would strengthen the way the school system communicates.

Ms. Prager commented that when developing the purpose and strategy for communications as a whole the objective should be to improve education through the backing and involvement of the community. By involving the community and businesses, there will be more feedback.

Ms. Mast made three points: (1) there is a need to decide what is the lead agency and the roles each perform to facilitate communication; (2) the school system should find a way to get shared funding for communications, for example, PTAs pay for a FirstClass connectivity; and (3) Friends of the Public Schools modeled after the program run by the county libraries.

Dr. Roberts thought the NAACP would be happy to see the Board follow up on working regularly with community leaders to dialogue with each other and school system representatives.

Dr. Robinson emphasized communication with parents who are new to the school system to inform them on how the system operates. There is a segment of parents who are intimidated by MCPS and the bureaucracy. He urged the Board to develop a plan to address various audiences and calibrate messages effectively to each group with consistency. The communications from MCPS must be dynamic, modified, and continuous as well as assessed for effectiveness. Finally, the parents who most need to know are the ones least likely to know what they need to know. Parental involvement will help make MCPS more effective in educating children.

Dr. Roberts stated that the NAACP works as advocates with parents in dealing with the school system. A relationship between those advocates and the school system would facilitate open communication with all parents.

\* Ms. Prager left the meeting at this point.

Mr. Ewing expressed appreciation for the comments expressed since they are helpful and useful. He stated that a strategic plan that will be put in effect has to take account of the fewer resources available at the staff level as well as Board members time. He was concerned about the prospect of undertaking more meetings including electronic meetings. He hoped the Board would not end up in a reactive position without time to reflect on issues and policies.

Mrs. Gordon commented that Board meetings do not have to be at the Carver Educational Services Center even though those meetings can be cablecast to reach a larger audience. If the Board is to be realistic about the people that it really wants to communicate with, the Board may not have to communicate more but differently with a different venue. Regarding the suggestion of meeting with community leaders, the Board might hold regular meetings occasionally in different parts of the county. She questioned how widely and to whom the Board's agenda was sent based on the fact that there have been many issues before the Board without input from the affected population. Mrs. Gordon commented that Dr. Robinson's point about people being intimidated by the school system illustrates the need for the school system to promote involvement for all parents. She also commented on the fact that MCPS employees appear to lack knowledge about Board policies and priorities.

Dr. Cheung supported outreach to the community, but not holding business meetings at various sites throughout the county. The cluster meetings held each year involves the Board meeting within that cluster, and those meetings could be expanded to involve teachers as well as the PTAs and principals.

Mr. Denne explained the county executive's approach to communications. The county executive has instituted a series of town meetings throughout the county where the public is invited to attend and present questions for both the county executive and a county council member. There are also a number of cable shows that serve to acquaint the citizens with the Montgomery County Government as well as the elected officials. The county government has a home page on the Internet for press releases as well as the cable schedule.

Mrs. Gordon suggested that the county executive invite a Board member to attend some of the town meetings since citizens have numerous questions about education within the county.

In regard to listening to citizens through hearings or forums, Ms. Rubens stated that was a specific recommendation in the televised discussion with community leaders as well as (1) the school system needs to use local print media especially ethnic media, to disseminate educational information; and (2) the school system not inadvertently cause an information gap as technology replaces other forms of communication since some citizens cannot access technology. As ombudsman, Ms. Rubens agrees that the majority of parents and citizens are satisfied with the school system but with a large system and the multitude of issues and policies there are those who are not totally satisfied. The number and types of issues where people are unhappy have been broad and far-reaching. In terms of communication, the lesson she has learned is that citizens and parents have a feeling of frustration of not knowing where to turn to resolve their concerns; however, this is a low percentage of unhappy customers.

RESOLUTION NO. 352-1996    Re:    **ADJOURNMENT**

On recommendation of the superintendent and on motion of Dr. Cheung seconded by Mrs. Gordon, the following resolution was adopted unanimously by members present:

Resolved, That the Board of Education adjourned its meeting of May 20, 1996, at 10:20 p.m.

---

PRESIDENT

---

SECRETARY

PLV:gr

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**TABLE OF CONTENTS**  
**May 20, 1996**

ANNOUNCEMENT ..... 1  
BOARD AGENDA ..... 1  
RESOLUTION HONORING SHARON FRIEDMAN ..... 1  
STRATEGIES FOR MORE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION ..... 3  
ADJOURNMENT ..... 9