

2011 Leadership Montgomery Outstanding Leader Award Nomination
Dr. Jerry D. Weast, Superintendent of Schools
Montgomery County Public Schools

Over the past 12 years, perhaps no one has defined the true essence of leadership in Montgomery County more than Jerry D. Weast.

As Superintendent of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), Dr. Weast has led MCPS during a time of dramatic change, including unprecedented shifts in student racial and ethnic demographics, substantial increases in the number of children who are living in poverty and a rapid spike in students who are English Language Learners.

Yet, amidst all this change, student achievement has reached an all-time high at MCPS. Among the most recent highlights:

- For two consecutive years, MCPS has had the highest graduation rate of any large school district in the nation, according to *Education Week*.
- The class of 2010 had an average SAT score of 1653, an all-time high for the district.
- During Dr. Weast's tenure, the number of AP Exams taken by MCPS students has more than tripled, as has the number of exams receiving a "college-ready" score of 3 or higher.
- Over the past three years, more than 90 percent of kindergarten students have met or exceeded reading targets and the achievement gap has closed among all subgroups.
- Seven MCPS schools placed in the top 100 of *Newsweek's* 2010 list of the nation's best high school and all of the district's high schools placed in the top 3 percent.

Montgomery County Public Schools, under Dr. Weast's leadership, has become a national model of how a large school district should be managed and the pride of our community. Numerous magazine and newspaper articles have chronicled the district's success. The Harvard Education Press published a book on MCPS' successful reform efforts. The district's national reputation was affirmed recently with two prestigious awards.

In October, MCPS was named a finalist for the Broad Prize for Urban Education, which recognizes large school districts that have improved student achievement and narrowed racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps. MCPS is the first district in Maryland and the Washington area to be a finalist for this award, which affords MCPS students \$250,000 in scholarships.

In November, MCPS was the recipient of the 2010 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, the highest presidential honor an American organization can receive for performance excellence through innovation, improvement and visionary leadership. MCPS is just the sixth school district—and the first large district—to ever receive the award. The Broad and Baldrige awards are strong, independent recognition that Montgomery County clearly has one of the best school systems in the nation.

Dr. Weast will, of course, credit this outstanding performance to the extraordinary work of the MCPS staff and rightly so. But high-performing organizations are led by strong leaders who are focused on the right outcomes, can motivate others to join them and have the courage to make difficult choices. Jerry D. Weast is an extraordinary and visionary leader and it is only fitting that, in his last year as

Superintendent, we honor his exceptional record of accomplishments and tireless service to the children of Montgomery County with the Outstanding Leader Award.

Dr. Weast exhibited this strong leadership soon after arriving in Montgomery County in 1999. He traveled across the county for countless meetings with parents, students, community groups, political leaders and employees to gather input and share ideas about what it would take to make a good school district a great one. In meeting after meeting, he mobilized the staff and the community to support his vision of closing the achievement gap and raising expectations for all students, regardless of their zip code, their race, ethnicity or family income. The result of this vision was a strategic plan that has been the foundation of Dr. Weast's tenure at MCPS. Despite the shifts in student population, the faltering economy and political pressures for change, that strategic plan—*Our Call to Action: Pursuit of Excellence*—has remained the “North Star” for all that MCPS has accomplished.

Not all the decisions Dr. Weast made were popular, but his priorities were clear and focused: the academic success of every student in the district. Even in the face of criticism and acrimony, Dr. Weast stood firm with his conviction and his commitment to do the best thing for the students of this community. His plan provided additional resources to schools with a high percentage of impoverished students that could be used to improve reading skills, provide support for students who were behind and place extra staff in those schools to lower class sizes.

While the national conversation about the achievement gap was still in the polite, throat-clearing stage, Dr. Weast put race on the table and challenged his staff and community to have a courageous conversation about why African-American and Hispanic students were scoring significantly lower than their white and Asian peers. He made sure his staff was reviewing each data point in the strategic plan—broken down by race—and coming up with workable strategies to improve performance and narrow the gaps. He insisted on breaking down silos and creating an organization driven by results and committed to the highest levels of accountability. He remained steadfastly committed to giving the taxpayers the best school system possible in return for their investment in MCPS.

The results speak for themselves. More African American and Hispanic students are taking and successfully completing Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate classes that prepare them for college and the work place than ever before. The achievement gap in reading and mathematics has narrowed dramatically at nearly every grade level. And the SAT scores of African American and Hispanic students in MCPS are significantly higher than the state, the nation and nearly every large district in the country.

It is these results and Dr. Weast's leadership that led U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to say recently: “If every district in the country had the results of Montgomery County, our country and our economy would be so much stronger...I don't think there is a better school superintendent in the country.”

Montgomery County's public school system is a source of civic pride and an economic engine for our county. This is due, in large part, to Dr. Weast's outstanding work over the past 12 years.

We can think of no one that represents the spirit of Leadership Montgomery more than Jerry D. Weast and we are extremely proud to nominate him for the 2011 Outstanding Leader Award.