

Office of the Superintendent of Schools
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

May 6, 2002

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jerry D. Weast, Superintendent of Schools

Subject: Update on Academic Progress of Broad Acres Elementary School

Broad Acres Elementary School is continuing to make academic progress in student performance following the reorganization of the instructional program and staff at the end of the last school year. Academic progress is evident in the development of improved reading and mathematics skills among kindergarten students through the first semester of this year and in the improved performance of students in Grades 2 and 4 on the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS) for 2002. Given the enormous challenges faced by this school because of poverty and lack of English language skills, the academic progress evident among its students is a reflection of their personal and individual success and the professional skills of a highly able and deeply committed instructional and support services staff, especially the principal, Ms. JoAnn A. Leleck. The earlier reorganization of Broad Acres, which was sparked by previously declining student progress, was a unique undertaking in the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), but in a short period of time it has proven to be rich in authentic examples of how such intervention can be replicated elsewhere in our school district.

Among the first to receive the early childhood education reforms implemented by the Board of Education two years ago, Broad Acres features the full-day kindergarten program with classes of 15:1 student-to-teacher ratio and the reduced class sizes (17:1) in Grades 1 and 2, as well as other specialized instructional and family support services. The Broad Acres' enrollment of more than 600 students has a poverty rate of 89.5 percent, reflecting student participation in the Free and Reduced-priced Meal Services (FARMS) – the highest participation rate in MCPS. More than 41 percent of students at Broad Acres are now or have been in the English for Speakers of Other Languages Program (ESOL), compared to 23 percent systemwide. The majority of the English language learners at Broad Acres speak Spanish or Vietnamese in their homes. The combination of poverty and learning the English language makes the school the most heavily impacted in MCPS, but there are literally dozens of other schools facing similar academic challenges. The Board of Education has approved the expansion of the full-day kindergarten and reduced class size initiatives to 56 elementary schools next year, compared to nine just two years ago. In addition, other academic supports in mathematics and reading are being planned for the federally funded Title I schools, including the Extended Learning Opportunity program this summer for students in Kindergarten through Grade 3.

The reorganization last year featured a stronger emphasis on literacy, an extension of the school day and school week, and the implementation of a highly competitive teacher recruitment process that offered stipend incentives for additional work and responsibilities in order to retain a high performance team of professional educators, including many who are bilingual. At least one, David Chia, is an award-winning teacher who became a staff development specialist at the school. The reorganization involved the collaboration of the school system's employee professional organizations, including the Montgomery Education Association, the Montgomery County Association of Administrative and Supervisory Personnel, and Montgomery County Council of Supporting Services Employees. Parent and community outreach activities included such initiatives as the Community Bridge Project, a unique partnership with former Peace Corps volunteers, immigrant organizations, businesses, and community members who help children and families highly impacted by poverty, language, and mobility.

The gains in kindergarten reading and math skills at Broad Acres was identified as part of a systemwide study of the impact of the kindergarten initiative, including the full-day instructional component, the revised kindergarten curriculum, the staff development program for kindergarten teachers, and the introduction of formative assessments during the school year. Data from the formative assessments have been collected on student acquisition of early reading skills and, for the first time this year, data were gathered on early math skills. Such data are used by teachers to improve instructional planning, by the school system to monitor student progress, and by parents to become more informed on the progress of their children.

Table 1 below compares the characteristics of kindergarten students at Broad Acres with the averages for all kindergarten students in the current 34 elementary schools that have the full-day kindergarten programs. On a comparative basis, Broad Acres is more heavily impacted by poverty and language than other full-day kindergarten programs. In fact, kindergarten students at Broad Acres are nearly twice as likely to be participating in FARMS as all students in the full-day kindergarten program across the county (63 percent compared to 34 percent). Approximately 20 percent of Broad Acres kindergarten students receive both FARMS assistance and instruction in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), compared to 15 percent among all of the 34 schools.

Table 1
Kindergarten Student Demographic Characteristics
Mid-Year 2002

Characteristics	Broad Acres (Number = 86)	Average for All Full-day Kindergarten Schools (Number = 3126)
Not ESOL or FARMS	16%	44%
FARMS Only	63%	34%
ESOL Only	1%	6%
ESOL and FARMS	20%	15%

Table 2 (below) compares the reading skills, measured in January 2002, of Broad Acres's current kindergarten students to the average of all kindergarten students in the 34 full-day kindergarten programs. Despite the extremely high incidence of risk factors for learning, the mid-year reading assessments demonstrate that:

- The kindergarten students at Broad Acres have mastered early reading skills -- including text-reading skills -- *at rates that exceed the average* for other MCPS schools with full-day kindergarten programs.
- A higher percentage of kindergarten students at Broad Acres (38.4 percent) were *reading text at level 3 or higher in winter – the target reading level for spring* – compared to all schools with full-day kindergarten programs.

Table 2
Kindergarten Student Reading Skills
Mid-Year 2002

Performance on Reading Assessments	Broad Acres Elementary	Average for All Full-day Kindergarten Schools
Scored in top 2 score ranges on both Letter Identification <u>and</u> Concepts About Print (CAP)	82.3% (Base N=86)	79.7%
For students scoring in top 2 score ranges on Letter ID, CAP, <u>and</u> Record of Oral Language: Also scored in the top 2 score ranges on both Phonemic Awareness and Hearing and Recording Sounds	56.3% (Base N=32)	49.7%
Took running records (text reading assessment) in winter	93% (Base N=86)	92%
Reading text at level 3 (target reading level for spring of K) or higher in winter	38.4% (Base N=86)	29.8%

Broad Acres also had a higher percentage of kindergarten students *meeting* standard in four of the seven mathematics skill areas than the percent among all students in 34 full-day kindergarten program (See Table 3 on next page). In fact, Broad Acres had a higher percentage of students *above* standard in three of the seven areas, compared to the percentage among all full-day kindergarten students. Among the areas that need more attention, two areas (position words and attributes) are language based and one area (correspondence) had not yet been taught and data were unavailable for the first semester. Although these Kindergarten Performance Assessments (KPAs) in mathematics are undergoing refinement, Broad Acres is clearly succeeding in the majority of the math instructional areas and experiencing difficulty in the areas that are language-

based, according to data collected in the first semester of this school year. The two areas where students experienced language difficulty is to be expected in a school that is heavily impacted by English language learning, especially among children for whom English is not spoken by their families in their homes (an area of great concern). Yet, even here, the comparative difference between the performance by Broad Acres students and children in all full-day kindergarten programs was slight (66.3 percent compared to 74.1 percent on position words and 69.9 percent compared to 75.4 percent on attributes). The preliminary findings underscore the concerns about the language abilities of kindergarten students in ESOL, the need for English language support for parents and other family members of students, and summer language and reading programs to improve retention of critical language, reading, and mathematics skills between school years.

Table 3
Results for First Semester
Kindergarten Performance Assessments (KPAs) in Mathematics
2001-2002

KPA	Concept	Percent Meeting Standard		Percent Above Standard	
		Broad Acres	All Full-Day K Schools	Broad Acres	All Full-Day K Schools
1	Directional/Position Words	66.3	74.1	36.0	43.2
2	Sorting by attribute	69.8	75.4	24.4	25.1
3	Generate and display data	91.9	90.8	60.5	50.0
4	Patterns	91.9	86.3	46.5	24.9
5	Sequencing	64.0	58.8	39.5	37.8
6	Number Sets	65.1	58.8	30.2	37.8
7	1-1 Correspondence	Not yet taught	61.0	Not yet taught	30.1

On the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS) for 2002 (see Table 4 on the next page), students in Grades 2 made a 5-point gain in reading and 13-point gain in mathematics, while students in Grade 4 maintained the previous year's achievement in reading and gained 3 points in mathematics.

Table 4
Comparison of 2001 and 2002 Grade 2 CTBS Median Percentiles
Reading and Mathematics
Broad Acres Elementary School

Grade	Median Percentile Reading		Change	Median Percentile Mathematics		Change
	2001	2002		2001	2002	
2	29	34	+5	22	35	+13
4	41	41	0	37	40	+3

Further analysis of the CTBS data, especially in comparison to the results of all schools with the class size reduction in Grade 2, is underway. Nonetheless, this preliminary data – combined with the results of the kindergarten analysis – clearly demonstrate that Broad Acres Elementary School is on the right path toward success for its students. Addressing the challenges of poverty and English language learning is a major focus of the school. But it is not seen as a problem that has to be resolved but as a characteristic of the community that needs to be accommodated in a way that allows students to flourish in an environment where their various cultures, languages, and experiences are respected. Such conditions are fast becoming a more common factor throughout Montgomery County, as many more schools enroll increasingly larger numbers of impoverished students, many of whom are learning English outside of their families.

Indeed, the student characteristics of many schools are quickly rivaling those at Broad Acres. Among the 56 schools that will have full-day kindergarten next year, nearly one-third have the highest ESOL population in the system (17 schools have above 31 percent of students who are now or have been in ESOL) – including six schools above 40 percent. In the last year, the highest poverty group (comprised of students who receive free breakfast and lunch support) increased by 4.7 percent, compared to an overall enrollment increase of just 2 percent. Therefore, the lessons learned at Broad Acres as a result of the instructional program changes and personnel reorganization at the end of last year can serve to strengthen our efforts in other schools. There is clearly an improved environment being developed at Broad Acres that should be replicated elsewhere. The expansion of full-day kindergarten, the class size reductions, the revised curriculum, and the improved staff development alone will not accomplish our academic objectives without the commitment to excellence on the part of the staff and principal that is evident at Broad Acres Elementary School.

I will continue to keep you informed.

JDW:kmy

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Executive Staff
Principals