

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Office of the Superintendent, 850 Hungerford Drive, Rockville, Maryland 20850 □ (301) 279-3381

June 27, 2000

Parents and Staff
Potomac Elementary School

Dear Parents and Staff:

The investigation has been completed into allegations of security violations in the administration of the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) at Potomac Elementary School. Several serious allegations, but not all, have been substantiated. I have made my recommendations to the state superintendent of schools regarding the validation of the tests. I also have recommended disciplinary action, where necessary, by state authorities. Recommendations to the Montgomery County Board of Education for local disciplinary actions already have been approved. A detailed report on the findings and recommendations from the investigation is enclosed for your review and information.

I want you and the entire community to know that the honesty and forthrightness of the students, parents, and staff during the course of this investigation are a credit to the school. You should be proud that the school has genuinely caring and professional teachers and other staff who have exhibited a deep and profound sense of responsibility for successful teaching and learning. Their students are the beneficiaries of an environment that demonstrated a high moral and ethical character during this investigation. I intend to build on that foundation as we complete the selection of a new principal and prepare for the new school year beginning next September.

Findings and Recommendations

The findings of the investigation by the Montgomery County Public Schools conclude that at Potomac Elementary School during the 1999-2000 administration of the MSPAP, the following occurred:

- Student performance was influenced by coaching, prompting, and additional time allocations, including significant extended time in at least two cases.
- Test security in the school for both third and fifth grades was lax and, at times, non-existent. Test booklets with student answers were reviewed by staff in some cases and left unsecured for unknown periods of time.

Therefore, based on the results of this investigation, I have recommended to the state that MSPAP test results be invalidated for the 1999-2000 school year for both Grade 3 and Grade 5 at the school. I expect that recommendation to be accepted by Dr. Nancy Grasmick, state superintendent of schools. The invalidation of the 1999-2000 tests means that the MSPAP results will not be used for school assessment by the state for that school year and that performance information for Potomac Elementary School will not be available for comparisons

with data for previous years or with other schools. Because the MSPAP is an assessment of school- and grade-level performance, test results are not reported for individual students. Therefore, there will be no repercussions from this action for individual students.

Allegations concerning the tests for 1998-99 were not substantiated, and actions were taken only for the 1999-2000 school year.

The resignation of Dr. Karen Karch, former principal of Potomac Elementary School, has been accepted. Ms. Zorina Mohammed, a fifth grade teacher at the school, will not be working in the Montgomery County Public Schools for the 2000-2001 school year.

In addition, the following actions are being implemented:

1. All Potomac Elementary School instructional staff will undergo a training program in testing protocols and procedures prior to the next standardized testing.
2. For the next two years, the administration of the MSPAP at Potomac Elementary School will be monitored by school system staff from outside the school.
3. All school-based staff in the system will review testing protocol and procedures and be provided information on the results of this investigation for their professional development.
4. Training in testing protocol and procedures will be emphasized among all newly hired teachers and principals in the school system.

I am confident that by working together in support of the needs of children, we can provide a quality academic program at Potomac Elementary School. The opening of the new school year will be preceded by the appointment of a new principal by July 6, and I expect that individual to work closely with parents, staff, and students to create the best possible environment for successful teaching and learning. If you have questions or concerns, please contact my office or Mr. Joseph I. Headman Jr., community superintendent, at 301-315-7361. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Jerry D. Weast, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

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Enclosure

Copy to:
Members of the Board of Education
Executive Staff