

Fiscal Year 2008 Budget Presentation
Dr. Jerry D. Weast, Superintendent of Schools
December 13, 2006

Thank you, Mrs. Navarro, and thank you, Dr. Munk, for your hospitality and for welcoming us to Rockville High School tonight. I also want to thank the staff here from our ESOL department and Deaf and Hard of Hearing program for simultaneously interpreting this evening's presentation in six languages.

In September, we celebrated the first steps of the journey to bring the International Baccalaureate program to Rockville High School. Eighty freshmen and their families accepted the IB challenge knowing that this prestigious diploma will open doors to the best universities in the world. These bright students will be creative thinkers ready to innovate and lead.

This will make Rockville our sixth IB high school and strengthen our position as one of the largest IB programs in the world. We owe much credit to Dr. Munk and IB coordinator, Debbie Wilchek, for their leadership in bringing the IB program here.

Their commitment to educational excellence is not uncommon throughout the ranks of our staff. In fact, it's what makes Montgomery County Public Schools such a special place. Tonight, we're here with the community, parents, staff and students to celebrate what we have accomplished together – and to acknowledge the work yet to be done.

You've heard me say it before, but I'll say it again – we have the finest education workforce in America – from our support professionals to our administrators to our teachers. In fact, delegations from all over the globe come here to learn about what we do. In the last five months, we've hosted 31 delegations from 18 different countries studying everything from our curriculum to our training to our special education programs.

The first thing visitors learn is that our quality starts at the top with the Board of Education. The Board put us on a clear path seven years ago, and has guided our reform efforts each step of the way, never losing sight of our goal to improve academic performance for every child and to close the achievement gap. We owe a great deal of thanks to our Board Members for their steady and strong guidance.

I want to thank my three deputies and our outstanding executive staff for their exceptional leadership each day. Together, Larry Bowers, Dr. Frieda Lacey and John Porter, and our leadership team keep a laser-like focus on student achievement.

Over the last seven years, we've received strong, consistent support from the county executive and the County Council. They have provided us with the funding we needed to turn the Board's vision into action. I want to take a moment to thank two gentlemen who have played a major role in our success – former County Executive Doug Duncan and

former Councilmember Michael Subin. Both Mike and Doug have been rock solid supporters of our school system.

Our new County Executive Ike Leggett has also been a steadfast supporter of MCPS throughout his years on the County Council. An educator himself and the brother of two teachers, Ike knows the value of good teaching and the important role education plays in the future of our community. I am looking forward to working with Ike, the new County Council, including President Marilyn Praisner, and the new Council Vice President and Education Committee Chair Mike Knapp.

There is no question that a key ingredient to the success of our students and our staff is the close collaboration we have with our three employee associations. I want to thank Merle Cuttitta, Becky Newman and Bonnie Cullison for their exemplary leadership and commitment to our reform efforts.

All of our partners, including the 51,000 parents involved in local PTA's, the Montgomery County Council of PTA's led by Dr. Jane de Winter; and the Montgomery County Business Roundtable for Education led by Jane Kubasik, share a common goal and vision – to prepare our children for a promising future in college and the world of work.

As you know, we work very carefully each year to align our budget with our strategic plan. And the 2008 budget is no different. As we do with every budget, we look at every dollar to make sure it is being used for maximum benefit. Our community has entrusted us with many resources over the last seven years to create a world-class school system. We take that trust seriously and I know that every day, our staff is keeping the promise of that trust. They are delivering outstanding results.

We've achieved these results during a time of significant demographic change. Over the last 7 years, the number of students who do not speak English as their first language has doubled to more than 14,700. And the number of students impacted by poverty has increased to 34,000. We have more children in poverty than ever before.

Students impacted by poverty and students with limited English skills require more intensive services to help them succeed. In Montgomery County, we're fortunate to have a community that supports our efforts to ensure that these students – like all children who walk through our doors – receive a world class education.

In Montgomery County, nothing less than the best will do.

OUR SUCCESS

Seven years of results confirm what we already know – that all children can succeed. We have more children achieving at higher levels than ever before:

Overall, 88 percent of our kindergartners now go on to first grade reading compared to 39 percent five years ago. We have closed the gap in Kindergarten between white students and their African American and Hispanic peers. Let me repeat that...we have closed the gap in Kindergarten. It is gone. The increased achievement is not determined by zip code. All students in all neighborhoods are reading at record levels.

These kids are now in the first grade. Let's keep the gap closed. We can do it!

In 2nd grade, our students continue to shine on national tests with more than three-quarters of them scoring better than the national average.

In 5th grade, a record 46 percent of the class is taking 6th grade math or higher, compared to just 2 percent in 2001.

In 8th grade, the number of students taking Algebra has steadily increased from 36 percent in 1999 to 49 percent today – twice the national average.

The International Baccalaureate program has grown tremendously from a little over 1,000 students in 2000 to nearly 6,000 students this year. We are only one of four school systems in the world to offer IB at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

The number of students enrolled in at least one Honors or Advanced Placement Course has soared, with 69 percent of all high school students enrolled in these rigorous courses. Seven years ago, we had 18,000 students taking Honors and AP classes. Today, we have more than 30,000! And just as significantly, an African American student in Montgomery County is more likely to take an AP test than a white student elsewhere in the nation.

For the second year in a row, Newsweek ranked every eligible high school in the top 3 percent in the nation. And we are the only school district in America to have five of our schools in the top 100 in the nation for two consecutive years. Congratulations again to Richard Montgomery, Bethesda-Chevy Chase, Thomas Wootton, Winston Churchill and Walter Johnson high schools!

The class of 2005 set a record for the district and far outdistanced the state and the nation both in participation and performance.

Across the nation, only 23 percent of seniors took an AP exam. In MCPS, 54 percent of our seniors took one. Across the nation, only 14 percent of seniors scored a 3 or higher on at least one test. In Montgomery County, 44 percent scored a 3 or better! And that's good enough for college credit.

Guess what...The class of 2006's performance is even better, setting a new MCPS record with 56 percent of the class taking exams and 45 percent scoring a 3 or better.

Impressively, a greater percentage of our African American and Hispanic students achieve higher passing scores than the national average for *all* students in 2005 and they'll do it again for the class of 2006.

We've made these gains because we opened up more high level courses to all students; we eliminated the old gatekeeping practices that kept students out; we created a new tool to identify those students who ought to be in AP courses; and finally, we're giving students extra support to ensure they succeed in these challenging courses.

BRITNEY POPE

Let's meet a remarkable young woman who accepted the AP challenge and will have completed six AP courses when she graduates in June – Britney Pope. I met Britney a couple of weeks ago at Gaithersburg High School when we opened the first high school stock trading room in the nation, thanks to a grant from NASDAQ and an anonymous local donor.

Britney is learning to be an expert trader in the innovative Academy of Finance and is showing quite the aptitude for business. She's successful because of her drive, her caring parents and because of a whole team of supportive teachers at Gaithersburg High School. Let's meet her....

VIDEO INSERT

Britney, there's no question that you've got a bright future ahead of you. I want to thank your teachers too – current and retired – for all they've done for you and all of the students at Gaithersburg. Britney just learned on Monday that Columbia University offered her a full scholarship next year! Congratulations! I know that you're going to be a great success in the business world or whatever you pursue. Remember, after you make your first million, you can make a tax-deductible contribution to the MCPS Education Foundation.

Seven years of positive results and success stories like Britney's show that we are on the right track.

Walk through the halls of Gaithersburg and our other schools. Talk with the men and women who affect the lives of children. You'll see posted and hear spoken phrases like: "I believe in you"; "I won't give up on you"; "You can do it".

These words help adults too as we endeavor to tackle the difficult issues that lie before us. You see, we've come a long way in creating a school system where every child has the opportunity to succeed. We've strengthened our curriculum and improved how we use data to drive instruction. We've also established a teacher training program that is a model around the country. But we are not there yet. We do not yet have a school system

where all children are treated equitably. Like most school systems in America, we have a persistent achievement gap, except for kindergarten.

We've chipped away at the gap, but if we are going to eliminate it once and for all, it means having some very difficult conversations as we do our work. What are the barriers we have left to break down? What is our individual belief system about race and poverty and their impact on academic success? What can we do collectively to get to that place where every one of us truly believes that EVERY child can achieve? We are on a journey – an uncomfortable one at times – and along the way we will have to confront bias, racism, and sexism if we are to make lasting progress.

I know we can do it. We've run quicker, climbed higher and transformed a school system faster than just about anyone would have expected. We have done it with an extraordinarily talented workforce.

The people of MCPS *are* our most valuable resource. It doesn't matter whether you teach, lead, guide, assist, counsel, drive, protect or feed our students. Each of our staff plays a key role that is critical to the mission of the school system. We work so well together because we operate like my old grandfather clock. It has a lot of moving parts. As long as all of the parts are working together, it keeps perfect time. If one part fails or gets off kilter, then the clock stops. That's MCPS, when all of our people are pulling together and working in unison, we work extremely well.

OUR PEOPLE

Let's meet some of the professionals who make MCPS run so well...the faces behind the success of our students....

Scott Steffan is the staff development teacher at Highland Elementary School. His principal, Ray Myrtle, says this about Scott, "The more I give him, the more he runs with it." Scott was instrumental in improving teaching and learning at Highland, which has a poverty rate of 73 percent. Highland exited the state's "needs improvement list" this year because the students met all 17 of the state testing targets for two years in a row. Consider these statistics – In 2005, 46 percent of third graders were proficient in reading. Today, nearly 78 percent are! In 2004, only 17 percent of special education students in 4th grade were proficient in math. Today, 68 percent are. The whole staff under Ray's leadership deserves our thanks and Scott had a big hand in helping them succeed.

Mary Belin manages the cafeteria at Sligo Middle School. She has been feeding and nourishing students at six different schools for 41 years! Mary has served more than 2.3 million meals to our students. She's a mentor and resource for students and lets nothing deter her from her mission. In fact, when traffic was gridlocked one morning during the sniper crisis, she parked her car at Blair High School and walked to Sligo because "her" students needed breakfast. That's an example of Mary's commitment to our children.

You have to admire the outstanding performance of Michael Zarchin and the great staff at Pyle Middle School – our National Blue Ribbon winner this year and one of our top performing schools every year. Pyle is the 32nd National Blue Ribbon winner in MCPS history and the eighth since 1999. Students at Pyle have consistently scored in the top 10 percent of all Maryland middle schools.

On Monday, we learned that Churchill High School has been named a Maryland Blue Ribbon winner. Congratulations to Principal Joan Benz and the outstanding staff and students at Churchill. Three out of four seniors in the class of 2006 took at least one AP exam, and 71 percent of the class scored well enough to earn college credit.

Joe Hallman retired as a building service worker at Monocacy Elementary two weeks ago after 38 years with MCPS. Joe not only took pride in his work, but he modeled respectful behavior for the students. He talked to the kids about doing well and being good citizens. We thank him for his many years of outstanding service and wish him the best in retirement.

Lisa Stuart of Cloverly Elementary School was named Maryland's Elementary Art Teacher of the Year. A Damascus High School graduate and daughter of an MCPS teacher, Lisa is an expert at integrating art into daily lessons. Last year, with the help of other art teachers, she developed *Project: Quality Time*. This annual event invites hundreds of MCPS families to explore the National Gallery of Art.

Krista Wilkinson is the Algebra lead teacher and Reginald Wright is the math resource teacher at John F. Kennedy High School. Together, they were instrumental in helping Kennedy students dramatically improve their performance on the high school assessments in Algebra. They worked with the other Algebra teachers to identify what each individual student needed to succeed, and then fashioned a plan to make it happen. Their hard work paid off. In 2005, just 27 percent of students were proficient in Algebra; this year they raised it to 68 percent!

Nelson McLeod opened Newport Mill Middle School a few years ago and has quickly turned it into one of the best performing middle schools in the system. A few weeks ago The Washington Post honored Nelson with its 2006 Distinguished Principal Award. Consider just one of his accomplishments. This year, 68 percent of his eighth graders are enrolled in Algebra – that includes 68 percent of African Americans and 60 percent of Hispanic students! Congratulations to Nelson and his entire staff. This puts Newport Mill in the top third of all middle schools even though it has the 3rd highest poverty rate.

Consider the work of Chris Berry, assistant principal at Blake High School and 21-year MCPS veteran. Chris is an outstanding instructional leader and has an excellent rapport with the students. This year, he was named the Maryland Assistant Principal of the Year. The director of the state principals' organization called him the finest candidate for this award he's seen in 26 years.

Karen McDowell is a first year ESOL teacher at College Gardens Elementary who came to us after raising her children. She was able to get her teaching degree through our university partnership program with the Johns Hopkins University. Karen works tirelessly every day helping her students learn English. But she doesn't stop there. Karen has taken the lead in establishing a parent education program to give parents the information and skills they need to help their children do better in school.

I am so impressed with the work of the kindergarten teams at McNair, Greencastle, and Fairland elementary schools. These teams clearly have a passion for their work. Whether students are struggling or need to move faster, the teams are successfully challenging every student, every day. The results? In all three schools, more than 90 percent of the African American students are meeting reading benchmarks.

At Bel Pre Elementary, Carmen Van Zutphen and her kindergarten team also achieved outstanding results for their students. 95 percent of the African American students are meeting the reading targets! Not only are all of the students succeeding in reading, but they are excelling in math. Carmen and the team assess every incoming kindergartner in math and then tailor the program for each student. As a result, 113 out of 114 of this year's kindergarten students at Bel Pre Elementary are already doing first grade math. This is at a school with 53 percent of the students impacted by poverty and a 26 percent mobility rate.

The success of these kindergarten teams is a perfect example of how our investments have made a difference. These teachers have specialized staff development, content coaches to assist them, academic intervention positions to work with struggling students, and paraeducators to support good teaching and learning. There is a whole support structure in place for our staff so that they can do their best. When they succeed, our students succeed.

Oliver Riggs is the security team leader at Springbrook High School. Yes, he keeps the school safe, but he also coaches basketball, and is always there when students and staff need him. He makes everyone feel valued and respected. Oliver was so admired by the students that the class of 2005 selected him to be the graduation speaker.

Kevin O'Neill at Wootton High School is a teacher with a passion for technology. He converted a lab into a technology education suite and uses instant response technology to quiz students to make sure they understand the lesson. Principal Michael Doran calls Kevin's energy boundless and says he's made a positive impact on the entire school. Because of his great work, the state technology association gave Kevin its first year teacher award.

Miss S, also known as Sheba Ram, is the face of our Ride by the Rules bus safety campaign. She has helped us improve behavior on our buses and give parents more confidence about the safety of their children. Our transportation fleet is the fourteenth largest in the nation, public or private, yet transports the fifth highest number of riders in the nation. Overall, nearly 1,300 buses travel more than 20 million miles a year.

Finally, I'd like to highlight the work of Vicky Parcan, principal at Silver Spring International Middle School. Two years ago, I asked Vicky to turn this school into a model for all to follow. She's doing an exceptional job of creating a culture of high expectations that is focused on improving student performance.

She is empowering teachers like Missy Sigley. Vicky gave her a clear mission – improve math instruction. Missy and her team rose to the challenge with increased professional development; more common planning time; a renewed energy and commitment; and a new model for special education.

The results?? ...a surge in math scores in every group – a 32-point gain in special education, a 20-point gain among Hispanic students, and a 19-point gain among African American students.

These are but a few of the thousands of MCPS team members who are shaping the future with their work. Each day, they inspire tomorrow's leaders. Each day, they spark a love of learning in a child. Each day, they make us proud. Please join me in giving them all a big round of applause.

I am pleased to announce that all of our great MCPS team members will see a salary increase next year. We have completed negotiations with our three employee unions on salary increases. I believe the new agreement is fair – to the employees, the taxpayers and the school system. The contract calls for a 4.8 percent salary increase in 2008, 5 percent in 2009 and 5.3 percent in 2010. Our employees deserve it. They've earned it and it's the right thing to do.

MIDDLE SCHOOL REFORM

Our people are the reason we've made such exceptional progress with our elementary reforms and our high school efforts. Now, we are asking our people to help us make our middle schools the best in the country.

The middle schools have made progress, but we know there are still inconsistencies in the middle school program. We're not alone; middle schools around the nation are grappling with the same challenges. That's why we launched a comprehensive and inclusive effort to transform middle schools last year. Our efforts involved hundreds of stakeholders and looked at every aspect of middle school from the structure; to the curriculum; to the after school activities. There is no one magic answer to the problems facing middle schools. But, together with our parents and our reform committee, we've developed an approach that will produce great results.

In this budget, we will be investing about \$2.5 million as part of a three year \$10 million reform effort. We'll start with five schools next year and focus on three things – developing staff content expertise; providing an accelerated curriculum with a heavy emphasis on math and reading skills; and improving leadership structures.

A significant portion of the middle school reform budget will fund content coaches in math and literacy. These coaches will work directly with the teachers to help them more effectively deliver top-quality instruction. We've used this model with great success at the elementary level, and know it will work just as well at the middle school level.

We're also going to redefine the role of team leaders so that they can be more effective in providing comprehensive and targeted assistance to teachers and students. When teachers have time to study individual student data, and when they have time to work creatively with each other, that's when you get results.

We'll expand the Professional Learning Communities Institute we began two years ago from elementary to middle schools to provide ongoing professional development for school leaders.

The middle grades are where students make important decisions that impact their academic and personal success. Are they taking Algebra by 8th grade? Are they learning organizational and study skills? Are they making good choices to avoid the dangers of drugs and alcohol and other risky behaviors? Strong academic achievement benefits from systems that support the whole child, both physically and mentally. That's why this budget includes funding for 16 new counselors in middle school. We are committed to ensuring that each and every student goes to high school well-prepared.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

One of the biggest areas we need to improve in middle school, and across the county, is special education. We are making progress, but we need to do more. We also need to move away from the 1970's model of separating special education students into different classes. We need to do more to keep them in their home schools so we can increase their academic success. We've had three years of positive gains in moving more students to the least restrictive environment, but are not yet at the level of inclusion that we want to be. This budget will help us continue our progress by educating more students in their home schools where we can give them greater access to a rigorous and challenging academic program.

Last year, we piloted a new staffing model called hours-based staffing in two middle schools – Forest Oak and Silver Spring International.

Simply put, it means that you put more staffing resources where you have students with the most needs. It also means staffing schools to serve children in their neighborhood school along with their brothers and sisters. The traditional model parceled out staff based on the number of students, but not necessarily on the intensity of the services they needed.

Again, look at Silver Spring International where we added three special education teachers to assist with math alone and saw a 32-point increase in math performance.

Now, you can walk into a math class there, and see both the main content teacher and the special education teacher working so well together – and both so versed in the curriculum – that you can't tell them apart.

In previous years, the special education teacher would have followed the students around to several classes without having the opportunity to develop content expertise in any one area. Now, that special education teacher can have the expertise to really deliver the material well. The same is true for English/Language Arts.

Quality teaching plus access to a challenging curriculum is what produces results for our special education children – and for all of our children.

We plan to invest \$2 million next year to roll out this new staffing model to 10 more middle schools. We believe our special education students will achieve at higher levels, just as we have seen at Silver Spring International.

When we help the neediest of our students, we are helping all of our students.

BUDGET PROCESS

Once again this year, we scrubbed our budget to make sure every dollar is wisely invested to deliver student results. Our three employee associations were involved in the budget process from day one. They joined us in looking for savings and deciding where to invest. Much of our success is due to the close working relationship we have with our employee associations. They helped develop our reform efforts and are committed to working side by side with us to give every child a top quality education.

We've engaged our parents and the community in the budget process early. The meetings, public forums, online exchanges, and feedback cards in six languages provided input to shape this budget. As a result, we are focusing our efforts to improve staff quality, strengthen middle school, increase school counselors, expand gifted and talented programs, increase translation services, and support special education students in general education classes.

Here's just one example of how we have worked with our community partners this year to turn feedback into action. We know that we need to do more to boost achievement among ESOL students. So the Board of Education formed the MCPS Latino Education Coalition after the community came to us with a very thoughtful report about the needs of Latino students. The coalition's recommendations led us to develop a pilot program at Wheaton High School for students who come to us from foreign lands. The program will assist older ESOL students who enter MCPS with little formal education and will focus on literacy, math and job skills, while helping them adjust to our community. Public education has played a unique role in opening doors for our immigrant communities. In MCPS, we take that responsibility very seriously and are committed to opening all doors for all students.

BUDGET REQUEST

Let's look at the numbers. Over the last five years, we have realigned about \$65 million in savings to pay for initiatives to improve student achievement. We've reduced administrative expenses down to 2 percent of the total budget. That is well below the state average.

In fact, we invest 80 cents of every dollar into our instructional programs, which is significantly more than the state average.

Next year, we are seeking a budget increase of 7.1 percent to continue our progress. Roughly, the increase breaks down like this –4 percent for negotiated salary increases, 1 percent for benefits, including for a retiree health benefits trust fund; 1 percent for salary step increases; and 1 percent for other changes including initiatives, inflation and utilities.

As is the case every year, the vast majority of the budget – 89 percent – pays for the great people like Nelson McLeod, Mary Belin and Krista Wilkinson and 21,000 more just like them. Our system is filled with talented people who are worth every penny we pay them. Every day, we entrust the future of our county – our children – in their hands. When we invest in our employees, we're investing in our community's future. We've already seen outstanding returns, so I think it's the smartest investment we can make.

It's become so costly to live in Montgomery County that a quarter of our workforce commutes into the county every day. In fact, a household earning \$90,000 a year cannot even afford a median priced home in the county. If you add skyrocketing electricity and gasoline costs to the mix, it becomes an even greater struggle for employees to make ends meet.

Another important investment we're making this year will take care of our retirees who have served this system well and earned our thanks. These good people have done much for generations of children in this community and we want to ensure a strong and secure retirement for them. We will contribute \$16 million dollars to a trust fund to meet new rules governing retiree health benefits.

We are carefully targeting several other investments to improve academic achievement.

- We'll invest another \$1.4 million in special education on top of the \$2 million for hours-based staffing.
- We'll invest \$1.8 million to improve high schools, with more resources for the Poolesville Magnet; more online courses; more counselors; more intervention and support programs; and the Wheaton pilot project for ESOL students with interrupted education.
- We'll invest \$3.7 million to continue our middle school reform efforts and to add 16 counselors to ensure students are getting the academic and mental health support they need.

- We'll invest \$2.7 million at the elementary level, to continue our plan to add assistant principals at every elementary school; to add art, music and physical education teachers; and to provide more team leaders to ensure instruction is being delivered at the highest level possible.
- We'll also increase our translation services to assist families who don't speak English so they can help their children be prepared for school.
- We will increase training for our 8,500 support professionals and provide them with more tools to do their jobs.

CLOSING

Tonight, you have heard about the critical supports we provide to teachers. We spend more than \$50 million a year in developing and improving our staff. Why? We do it because this investment ensures that teachers have the preparation and training they need to deliver high quality instruction. If teachers are successful, then they are likely to remain in the profession. Nationally, nearly 50 percent of teachers drop out of teaching in the first five years. That's why we nurture, support, develop and train our teachers. Behind every successful student is a successful teacher. It's as simple as that.

I want to introduce you to one more staff member, Emily LOOD- key, a first year teacher at Blake High School. She's the type of teacher we want for all of our children – driven, dedicated, and devoted to her students. She's already making a big difference in the lives of her students. Take a look...

VIDEO INSERT

Emily is an inspiration to all of us – and a reminder that teaching can no longer be a solitary endeavor. It takes strong principals, like Blake Principal Carole Goodman, assistant principals, consulting teachers, staff development teachers, resource teachers, paraeducators – an entire network of people focused on making Emily a successful teacher. And folks, it's worth it – for every one of the 138,000 students in our school system.

Never have I been prouder of the women and men of MCPS. After seven years of hard work together, we're accomplishing great things for our students and we're going to do even more. We're closing the achievement gap and we're preparing every student for success.

I know why we all chose this profession. We wanted to change the world – one child at a time. Albert Einstein summed it up perfectly when he said, "Only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile." Our staff does that each and every day. They are making a difference in our children's lives. And for that, on behalf of the entire community, I say thank you and good night.