

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

September 13, 2011

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Joshua P. Starr, Superintendent of Schools

Subject: Board of Education Fiscal Year 2013 Operating Budget Interests

As I embark upon the process to develop my recommended Fiscal Year 2013 Operating Budget, I would like to engage the Board of Education in an exercise to discuss any broad budget interests that the Board may have. This is a useful process that I employed in Stamford, Connecticut to ensure that my staff and I were fully aware of the interests of the Board. It also enhanced transparency and led to a richer discussion of the operating budget over the course of the year.

In preparation for this session, it is important that everyone has a common understanding of interest-based problem solving and knows the difference between interests and positions. The book, *Getting to Yes*, by Roger Fisher and William Ury, is an excellent source that illuminates the concepts of interest-based bargaining and problem solving. To quote from the text, "Interests motivate people; they are the silent movers behind the hubbub of positions. Your position is something you have decided upon. Your interests are what caused you to so decide." For example, an interest may be developing a world class workforce, while a position might be that we need to hire more staff development teachers.

I am attaching a brief primer for your information and also will share with you the chapter from *Getting to Yes* that specifically discusses the importance of focusing on interests and not positions. If everyone is well-versed on this text, it will provide for a more fulsome discussion at the Board meeting.

I fully understand that we are very early in the process and that this exercise will likely yield only preliminary insights from the Board. We will be seeking feedback and involvement from our many stakeholders throughout the budget process until its culmination in May 2012. I am not discounting the later stages of our public input process at all, but at the same time, I believe it is a valuable opportunity for us to begin to have this robust dialogue among the Board and staff.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

JPS:sln

Attachment

# Interest Based Problem Solving

## Summary

Step 1: Define the Problem

Step 2: Determine Interests

Step 3: Develop Options

Step 4: Select a Solution

# Interests

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1. Look for underlying motivations
2. Ask yourself-----
  - Why is this important?
  - What conditions will be addressed?
3. Discover your interests *and* their interests
4. Use a framework of interests not positions
5. Remember - It is easier to reconcile interests than positions
  - Often there are multiple interests
  - Usually there are several methods to satisfy an interest
6. Challenge assumptions
7. Prioritize

## **INTERESTS ARE NOT ACTIONS, ACTIVITIES OR PROGRAMS**

If you are thinking about an action, activity, or program ask yourself:

- “If this action, activity or program is implemented, what needs would be addressed?
- Why is a decision on this topic important?
- What would be the results or consequences?
- How will this decision impact the topic that you are addressing?

Key Point - in Interest-Based Strategies, the parties *always* have the *ability* to say “no” to an option — but they have the *responsibility* to explain the objection in terms of their interests.

## INTERESTS

Interests are a primary tool for evaluating the value of options when addressing the problem or issue in the Interest Based Strategies process. “The basic problem in a negotiation (decision making) lies not in conflicting positions, but due to a lack of understanding of each side’s needs, desires, concerns, and fears. .... Such desires and concerns are interests. Interests motivate people; they are the silent movers behind the hubbub of positions. Your position is something you have decided upon. Your interests are what caused you to decide”. (Getting to Yes, by Roger Fisher and William Ury, p.42)

Defining and capturing interests is a critical step in the IBS, and other information gathering processes (focus group or team meetings). It is a difficult concept for many people to understand, as it is an additional, but often subconscious step in most people’s decision making process. Most decision making processes start with story and then jump to a decision, or at best, options and then a decision. In consensus decision making processes, developing and understanding interests are very important in reaching consensus. Some feel that adding a focus on interests slows down the decision making process, when in fact, it builds understanding of the parties needs, desires, concerns and fears, and leads to consensus decisions. The process also establishes trust, and offers the opportunity for creativity in reaching more complete and longer lasting decisions on very complex issues.

### Questions to help draw out interests:

Why is it important for us to resolve this issue, or to develop this plan?

Once a decision is made, what value will it have?

How will we or our students benefit from this?

What value does this bring to our lives?

What are the driving forces behind this issue or plan?

If we were to accomplish this, what would it do for you?

What value does this bring to the children we teach?

These are some questions that may guide participant’s thinking when gathering interests. One can use the above questions to find the underlying need, desire, concern or impact of the option. This will help people think deeper about why this option is important to those involved in the process. Options are usually an action. Options may sound like positions and sometimes are. The process of gathering interests is a way to establish an understanding of the values that impact the issues or topic being explored, improve relationships and establish a collaborative culture.

## INTERESTS ARE NOT ACTIONS, ACTIVITIES OR PROGRAMS BUT THE OUTCOME OF THE ACTIONS, ACTIVITIES OR PROGRAMS

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*Jermitt Krage*

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