

**Testimony for the Montgomery County Council  
Fiscal Year 2024 Operating Budget  
by Paul Geller, Community Advocate - Thursday, April 13, 2023**

Council President Glass, Council Vice President Friedson, and distinguished Councilmembers,

Good afternoon. Thank you for allowing me to testify.

For Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, the County Council for the first time agreed to exceed Maintenance of Effort (MOE) by \$89,965,802. Melissa McKenna and I led that effort after prodding MCPS leaders to ask for everything they needed all at once, rather than piecemeal. We will be ever grateful for receiving nearly 90% of the \$100 million we requested.

MCPS approached us in late 2016 stating they again needed funding above MOE to hire more staff, for certain accelerators and more. We understood this was necessary, and got to work. The Council allocated an additional \$19,000,000 above MOE for FY2018. This too was greatly appreciated.

In late 2017 MCPS mentioned the need to exceed MOE yet again. By this time we were skeptical. Yet, the intentions of MCPS were good, and we set about our work. MOE was exceeded by \$18,584,588 for FY2019. We were grateful and pretty much done asking you to exceed MOE.

The total over MOE for those three years alone is \$127,550,390. Until the law is changed, this is the additional amount MCPS has received annually since July 2018; a total of \$836,683,554 and counting.

Without our help, MCPS asked and the County Council saw fit to exceed MOE three more times: \$8,701,199 for FY2020; \$349,430 for FY2022; and \$86,409,225 for FY2023. This totals up to an additional sum of \$95,459,854 for MCPS annually. When the pandemic related ESSER funds are added to this amount, it becomes quite sizable. Are students succeeding enough to justify this cost?

The current request to exceed MOE in FY2024 by \$272,245,984 is stunning. To put this into context, from FY2017 – FY2023, the County Council exceeded MOE by a grand total of \$958,596,435. This amount increases by \$223,010,244 annually and does not include \$389,244,205 in ESSER funds. For our county's 1,054,827 residents, this seven year total represents a tax burden of \$211.41 for every person each year, or an additional \$845 a year for a family of four. The proposed amount will increase this to \$469.51 per person and \$1,878.05 for a family of four.

If MOE is exceeded by the full requested amount for FY2024, MCPS will receive an additional \$495,256,228 annually from now on over MOE. **This one year ask is 22% more than all the MOE increases over the last seven years combined.** A reasonable person must ask if this is worth it.

My best research efforts yielded little concrete evidence to support any direct and measurable benefits MCPS students will gain by this astounding amount. What specific goals and programs does MCPS have in mind for this additional funding? Too many students were struggling with being college and career ready before the pandemic. One of the most subscribed courses at Montgomery College is basic English (remedial). Just the mere fact the original MCPS budget request was for \$224,000,000 over MOE in December, and ballooned to \$272,245,984 in February is shocking. One must ask why is this funding needed, what will it go towards, and how will it benefit students?

Some facts about the MCPS Operating Budget request:

- In 2016, when MOE was exceeded for the first time, MCPS hired 541 more teachers and 112 instructional aides/assistants with the additional \$89,965,802; along with new accelerators,...
- Today MCPS is asking for MOE to be exceeded by \$272,245,984 yet a nearly identical number of teachers, 550, will be hired, along with other staff, more accelerators,...
- MCPS had \$154,000,000 remaining in ESSER funding as of January 31, 2023.

And some questions for MCPS:

- More accelerators are proposed. How have the accelerators funded since FY2017 performed?
- What underperforming or poorly performing programs/initiatives/accelerators has MCPS eliminated since FY2017? Why were they eliminated?
- How will additional money fix issues related to school climate?
- Is there an incentive program in place to reward MCPS teachers and staff for better ways to teach students and/or save money by cutting unsuccessful concepts?
- What is MCPS doing to address the ongoing issue of biased educators in classrooms?
- Regarding existing programs, as one example, the extra 30 days of instruction at Innovative School Calendar (ISC) programs at Arcola and Roscoe R. Nix Elementary Schools have shown almost no measurable MAP-R improvements for students, and only marginal improvements in MAP-M. Student absentee rates exceed 20% during the summer. Teacher and paraeducator turnover and burnout is an issue<sup>1</sup>. Yet MCPS is requesting \$263,400 for consultants to expand innovative calendar schools<sup>2</sup> that are an unproven concept and problematic. Why not return to the successful, popular, and less costly, Excel Beyond the Bell and ELO SAIL Programs?

Once Maintenance of Effort (MOE) is exceeded, it is an annual expense. Money cannot buy everything. Please weigh the ongoing generosity of the County Council with the ability of residents to shoulder an additional burden of this unprecedented magnitude. Will students really be better off?

Thank you,  
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<sup>1</sup> MCPS Memorandum, Subject: Opening of Innovative Schools, dated July 26, 2022.

[https://go.boarddocs.com/mabe/mcpsmd/Board.nsf/files/CGKVDN804301/\\$file/Opening%20Innovative%20Schls%20220726.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/mabe/mcpsmd/Board.nsf/files/CGKVDN804301/$file/Opening%20Innovative%20Schls%20220726.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> MCPS Memorandum, Subject: Tentative Adoption of the Superintendent's Recommended Fiscal Year 2024 Operating Budget, dated February 23, 2023.

[https://go.boarddocs.com/mabe/mcpsmd/Board.nsf/files/CPCRLZ688D03/\\$file/ADOPTED%20Tentative%20Adoption%20FY2024%20Op%20Bdgt%20230223.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/mabe/mcpsmd/Board.nsf/files/CPCRLZ688D03/$file/ADOPTED%20Tentative%20Adoption%20FY2024%20Op%20Bdgt%20230223.pdf)