

MCCPTA Background Sheet on Survey of School Environment

In order to begin work on the annual Survey of School Environment, the Department of Shared Accountability (DSA) submitted a request to the MCPS budget freeze committee asking for authority to spend \$23,000 on contractors. (Payments to contractors were frozen when the County Executive asked MCPS to find savings in the current year's budget.)

This request prompted an evaluation of the process of conducting this annual survey. The request for the \$23,000 was denied and MCPS decided to postpone all surveys until the 2008-09 school year. They are contemplating conducting these surveys every two years for the indefinite future.

For the past two years the surveys have been administered in the following manner:

Student Surveys: Schools have the option of giving students paper copies of the surveys or having the students complete the surveys online. Completing them online is easier at the ES level because with smaller school populations it is easier to schedule class time in a computer lab. Secondary schools tend to have the students complete paper versions of the survey. MCCPTA was told that school staff consider this survey a pain to administer. Student survey results are available on the MCPS web site. The Shared Accountability Advisory Committee has been working to improve the wording of the questions to students to eliminate confusion. This year's student survey was to include changes in wording suggested by this committee.

Staff Surveys: School staff complete an online version of the survey. The results of the staff surveys are not publically released per an agreement with the employee associations.

Parent Surveys: MCPS selects a random sample of 30% of parents in each school (distributed evenly over selected grades). Surveys are mailed to each parent. Surveys are available in the five translated languages. Parents are given information on how to obtain the translated version. There is also an option to complete the survey online. MCPS sends a reminder notice to parents who have not returned the survey by a certain date. The return rate for parent surveys is quite low, although the change to a random sample with reminders sent has increased the return rate. Parent survey results are available on the MCPS web site.

Cost of Surveys:

Per MCPS, the total cost of administering the surveys is \$300,000. Of that, approximately \$120,000 reflects the salary and benefits of permanent DSA employees' time spent on the surveys. Since these employees will still be employed, albeit working on other projects, MCPS considers the incremental cost of the survey to be \$180,000. Of that, approximately 45% is the expense of mailing the surveys to parents. Other costs include payments to contractors to translate the documents.