

“Federation Corner” column

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## **Parents cheer back to school**

By Brian Karem

Yes, folks, it's that time of year again! Public school in Montgomery County begins on August 31<sup>st</sup>. And with it, the Board of Education (BOE) and Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) staff turn to thoughts of cash. Fiscal Year (FY) 17 is coming up, and the MCPS Department of Management, Budget and Planning (DMBP) has released its annual Operating Budget Guide and schedule for internal MCPS use.

All budget submissions are due to DMBP on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2015. According to the Guide, each office's budget submittal must include four sections: a Program Mission Summary; the base, or same services level budget; an organization chart; and a 'Program Efficiency, Abandonment, and Redirection (PEAR)' process, providing information on how to reduce the budget and including reduction targets. The Program Mission summary every year includes 'Performance Measures' And this year is no exception. And every year at our Budgetpalooza! we examine some of those 'Performance Measures.' Sadly we find they aren't really measures, even though the Guide states they “must include measurable outcomes” and “not just outputs” (bold and underline is in the Guide, not our changes). These must be submitted electronically.

The “PEAR” submittal anticipates that the fiscal outlook for Montgomery County, and MCPS, does not look good. So this year departments are being asked to submit three scenarios.

“Scenario A asks that offices reduce 1% of their school based resources and 3% of their central office resources. Scenario B asks that office (sic) reduce 1.5% of their school based resources and 5% of their central office resources. Scenario C asks that office (sic) reduce 2% of their school based resources and 10% of their central office resources.”  
(page 7 of the FY 2017 Operating Budget Guide)

The DMBP will roll up the budget, with the assistance of the internal Operating Budget Steering Committee, and the budget will be presented to the Board of Education on December 8<sup>th</sup>. Public hearings this winter will be held on January 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, at BOE sessions that begin at 7pm.

Next the BOE will hold two public work sessions, on January 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016, at 6pm. As a reminder, the BOE members used to take their responsibility as guardians of our hard-earned tax dollars seriously, and carefully review each page of the budget. But that has not been the case for many years. Instead, a quick review is all that's required for this MCPS BOE to approve the budget and send it on to your elected county councilmembers. The BOE will act to adopt the FY17 Operating Budget on February 9, 2016.

And that's when we citizens get to work! Each year we ask for volunteers in our community to take a chapter and review the proposed budget in detail for the Annual Budgetpalooza! Our civic activist colleagues here at the Civic Federation, the Parents' Coalition of Montgomery County, and the

Montgomery County Taxpayers League organize this annual event to review the MCPS Budget, which currently sits at \$2.4BILLION.

This year we are gearing up early. We invite you and your friends and neighbors to jump in and take a chapter. We'll set up the chapters on [www.signupgenius.com](http://www.signupgenius.com) and reserve the room (usually the Rockville Memorial Library). We'll even provide the drinks and snacks. The rest is up to you.

Our annual MCPS budget is half of our entire county operating budget. So, yes, it matters. The other half goes to everything else. Fire, Police, Parks, transportation, road planning, repairs to those pesky potholes, snow removal, libraries, health and human services, services to our homeless, indigent, and underserved residents who desperately need our help to make it through the year. Half.

There are eight board members, including the student member, newly-elected Eric Guerci, a student at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School. The current president, Pat O'Neill, is currently serving her fifth four-year term, so has been on the BOE for almost 20 years. Her current term as president is the fifth time for her in that position. Next year, 2016, is an election year and three BOE seats will be up for grabs. Phillip Kauffman, At-large member; Rebecca Smondrowski, District 2; and Chris Barclay, District 4, all have seats up in 2016. How does your BOE representative spend your money? Let's find out.

Here's one small example: So far in 2015, your elected BOE members have spent over \$6,500 on 'ticketed events,' including 'legislative events,' MCCPTA events, and the County Executive's Arts Ball. How fun for them! Mr. Barclay billed the taxpayers \$1,339 for these tickets, and Ms. Smondrowski's tab came to \$1,013. I hope they had a good time! And travel, we travel. For local travel, Mr. Barclay took \$3,231.92 of your tax dollars, and Ms. Smondrowski, \$4,077.20. Mr. Kauffman's charge was \$2,615.77. Ms. O'Neill billed taxpayers \$1,777.51 for her local travel expenses. But the person who billed the most is Member Mike Durso, at \$4,263.00. The total, for BOE members and staff, for local travel expenses, came to \$23,789.35. I wonder how many text books that would buy. Oh well.

So, before the BOE sends the proposed budget on to the Council and the County Executive on March 1, have your say. After all it's your money. Every last penny.