

"Federation Corner" column
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Education matters

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This column is a reprint of an article appearing in the October issue of the Montgomery County Civic Federation Newsletter.

Update on the Pearson Contract

The Board of Education (BOE) signed a contract on June 8 with Pearson, an international media company, to develop an 'integrated' and online curriculum. Pearson will market the curriculum and Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) will receive up to 3% in royalties.

According to the contract, (i) Pearson "shall be able to use MCPS's name, marks, logos, and other indicia on the Program to identify MCPS as one of the authors of the Program; and (ii), Publisher may use MCPS Marks in connection with advertising, promotion, and sale of the program." To read the entire contract, go to <http://scr.bi/mcps-pearson> .

I asked Brian Edwards, Chief of Staff, MCPS, and one of the project managers of the contract for a copy of the "Program Development Plan" which was due as a deliverable 14 days after the contract was signed. As of this time (beginning of October), the "Program Development Plan" is still incomplete and unavailable.

Federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program Grant Application

In April, MCPS informed the Board of Education that they had submitted a grant proposal to the U.S. Department of Education to create two magnet schools. Watkins Mill High School would become an "International Baccalaureate School of Engineering, Digital Design, and Performing Arts." Wheaton High School and the co-located Thomas Edison High School of Technology would be merged to create a "high tech high school."

Thomas Edison HS currently offers 19 programs in Vocational Education including cosmetology, plumbing, hospitality, and carpentry. It provides a supportive learning environment for students with learning disabilities and career training for students who do not plan to attend college. It is unclear what will happen to the VocEd programs at Edison if this plan is implemented. MCPS apparently did not contact the Special Education community about this proposal.

As a sidebar, the grant includes a 'Voluntary Desegregation Plan' as was required by the Department of Education upon submittal of the grant proposal. According to the grant proposal, students would be admitted to each school by a "race-neutral lottery system."

NOTE: In its October 7 edition, The Montgomery Sentinel reported that "the federal government rejected a \$3.2 million proposal to convert three Montgomery County high schools into magnet schools in the coming years, according to Marshall Spatz, the director of management, budget and planning for Montgomery County Public Schools." The Sentinel article also reported that "...some Thomas Edison parents may be relieved that the money did not come through after many of them spoke out against the proposal earlier this year, claiming that the merger would compromise the quality of special education."

Choosing a New Superintendent

MCPS Superintendent Jerry Weast will retire effective June 30th, 2011. In a memo dated September 16th, 2010, Patricia O'Neill, BOE President, laid out a timeline for choosing the new superintendent. An 'ad hoc' committee consisting of Ms. O'Neill, Board members Christopher Barclay and Philip Kauffman and Ikhide Roland Ikheloa, the Board's Chief of Staff, will start this effort by issuing a Request for Proposals to education search firms, by September 20th, 2010, with the closing date for submittals of proposals by October 22nd. The memo also discussed the possibility of choosing a superintendent "from a non-traditional background."

The committee will review the submitted proposals and choose a search firm by December 2010. The Board then plans an offsite retreat with the selected firm. These retreats are open to the public, however usually no notes or minutes are taken and they are not broadcast, as are the regular BOE meetings.

What would you like to see in a new superintendent? What concerns you about MCPS? Make sure your voice is heard. The superintendent of MCPS manages not only the county's public education system – he or she will also manage 57% of our entire county budget. And, remember that MCPS is an independent agency, so there is little county or state oversight, or enforcement, of any financial audits.

The entire BOE memo, timeline for the superintendent search, and proposed Request for Proposal is at <http://scr.bi/mcpssupsrch> .

NOTE: The Montgomery County Civic Federation is planning to offer a program on the search process for a new School Superintendent at its December 13 meeting. As always, the public is invited and encouraged to attend monthly meetings of the Civic Federation, which are held in the first floor auditorium of the County Council Building in Rockville.

Budget Discussions in October

Please remember that the BOE is holding roundtable discussions in October regarding the upcoming Montgomery County Public Schools budget. One roundtable discussion was held October 13 at the Carver Education Services Center in Rockville. The final roundtable will be held October 28 at Wheaton High School from 7 to 9 p.m. To sign up for the remaining roundtable, call 301-279-3617 now.

The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800-1000 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to theelms518@earthlink.net