



ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

May 23, 2012

Dr. Joshua Starr, Superintendent of Schools
Ms. Shirley Brandman, President, Board of Education
Montgomery County Public Schools
850 Hungerford Drive
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Dr. Starr and Ms. Brandman:

We are writing regarding the fiscal sustainability and implications of your recently negotiated employee agreements. We are concerned that the Board's decision to provide two raises in one year may have an adverse impact on the classroom in future years.

As we have shared with you, the Council and the Executive have been flooded with correspondence, public testimony, and personal communication from parents and teachers expressing frustration with recent programmatic reductions, including increasing class sizes, in the school system. These advocates have repeatedly referenced the budget reductions of recent years as preventing schools from having enough classroom resources.

For your recently announced collective bargaining agreements to include two base pay raises in one year seems incongruent with these concerns about classroom resources. The Board's budget already indicated that its compensation would be more generous than any other County employee would receive. To add then a second raise for most employees to "restore" an increase that did not occur in FY11 is a concern, particularly when no employee in any other County agency will receive even one base pay raise. FY11, as you remember, was a year in which no County agency employees received a step increase, and in which all employees except MCPS employees took furlough days.

This twofold addition to the salary base raises serious questions about the capacity to address critical classroom needs within a Maintenance of Effort budget going forward. We understand that you have allocated funds in the FY13 budget to accommodate these increases in the coming fiscal year and we commend you for staying within a Maintenance of Effort budget in FY13. However, these increases were principally funded with what you have acknowledged are extraordinary one-time savings. Accordingly, we are concerned that the ongoing costs of these compensation agreements will crowd out your ability in future years to fund enhancements that parents and teachers alike have been asking for to improve the teaching experience and student learning. A more prudent approach would have been to provide compensation improvements commensurate with the timing of an improving economy in order to assure that those increases were affordable, sustainable and appropriate relative to your other needs.

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The Executive and the Council fully intend to meet the MOE requirement for the MCPS budget again in FY14, but, with the continued uncertainty about the economic recovery, the Board should certainly not assume that we can or will exceed it. In addition to class size, Board members as well as community stakeholders speak frequently to the need to restore much needed music teachers, media assistants, counselors, and academic intervention teachers. We hope that the Board's choice to fund compensation increases in FY13 does not jeopardize its future ability to fund the instructional and support elements that make our public school system a uniquely rich teaching and learning environment for our teachers and students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Isiah Leggett', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Isiah Leggett
County Executive

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Berliner', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Roger Berliner
Council President