

Legislative Forum Report
Northwest Advisory Council
November 17, 2005

The Northwest Advisory Council held its annual legislative forum at Woodholme Elementary School. Delegates Jon Cardin and Dan Morhaim, along with Erin O'Conner, County Executive Jim Smith's Education Liaison, and Bill Lambert, representing Delegate Adrienne Jones were in attendance. Several other legislators were unable to attend due to prior commitments. School Board member, Mr. Joe Pallozzi, and Dr. Scott Gehring, Northwest Area Superintendent, were also in attendance.

The discussion included an overview of some of the education issues that are expected to be priorities this year on the state and local levels. Pension enhancement will be at the top of the list this year. Since Maryland's teachers' pensions rank last in all the states, and it has become a problem for the recruitment and retention of teachers, it will be addressed this year at the state level. All of the legislators voiced strong support for an upgraded pension.

Delegate Cardin talked about a bill he is planning to introduce to the legislature this year to help address the achievement gap in our county. It would be a pilot program for at risk youth that would involve a summer learning program. It would be funded with new education dollars. Delegate Morhaim talked about the buying consortium bill that he introduced a few years ago that has become legislation to allow all schools to buy items together at a substantial savings. Mr. Lambert stated that education is near and dear to Delegate Jones' heart and as chair of the capital budget committee, she works directly with moneys for school construction.

The issue of overcrowding in the Northwest is still important throughout our district. Construction of two new elementary schools and a new high school in our area has been unprecedented, and the community is very thankful for these additional facilities. However, Cedarmere Elementary school is still substantially overcrowded and many others are overcrowded as well. Construction of a new middle school in Owings Mills was also a topic of much discussion. The state legislators have helped to secure land for the middle school and now the funding and need will have to be addressed. The legislators informed the community of the procedures that would be followed before the new middle school could be built.

The question of money for all of our buildings by way of the capital budget was addressed. Will the \$400 million surplus go to school construction? The county executive has submitted a proposal for construction dollars for our county already and has sent a letter to the governor asking for that \$400 million surplus to go toward school construction. It was explained that the governor will submit his budget thirty days after the legislative session starts. Ms. O'Connor assured the group that education is Mr. Smith's number one priority.

Teachers' salaries and recruitment and retention were other major topics of discussion. A need to increase salaries to attract and retain our teachers was noted by all. A long discussion centered around retention of teachers and getting our more experienced teachers to work in some of our needier schools. Many ideas were generated and the group was very interested in continuing that discussion. It was decided that our February 7th meeting would center around closing the achievement gap and possibly come up with some suggestions to address this most pressing issue.

We would like to request a better means of communicating with the public about our advisory council meetings. We send a flyer to each school to put in the school newsletter, and we ask principals to let their PTA presidents know about our meetings. However, no last minute reminders or community outreach is done. It has been suggested that an education page be fostered in the local papers, especially *The Sun*, to include an education calendar posted weekly so that interested citizens are apprised of the upcoming events. *The Sun* has an education section in many other counties and we would like to see one in Baltimore County, too. It would also be helpful if the Superintendent's Bulletin could contain a reminder a few days or a week before the meetings. If press releases could be sent out near the date of the meeting, then all stakeholder groups would be notified at that time as well.

We have been one of the better attended councils and we still struggle with people coming to our meetings. If we had a better way to notify the community, we believe that the community input would be substantially better.

Respectfully submitted by,

Abby Beytin, Northwest Advisory Council Chair