

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: **UNSATISFACTORY PROGRESS: THE PURSUIT OF GOOD SCHOOLS IN SUBURBAN AMERICA, 1940-1980**

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This project is a case study of educational politics in Montgomery County, Maryland, an affluent suburban county bordering Washington, D.C., from 1940 to 1980. Following World War Two the county experienced significant population growth due to the baby boom and migration, transforming it into a thriving suburb. Concurrently, state party control over the county's school system was replaced by a pluralist system characterized by local grassroots activism, allowing groups of citizens to articulate and organize around distinct educational visions influenced by attitudes about race, class, and political ideology. Citizens debated the meaning of good schools and discussed the best way to achieve them, and over time conflicts between proponents of different educational philosophies revealed clearly defined segments of people within the county.

These divisions developed within a consensual yearning for excellent public schools, and this dissertation explores the tension between the shared desire for educational excellence and the specific, competing desires of activists to define educational quality and influence educational policy. Current scholarship on the history of education in America focuses on urban schools or examines particular issues, like desegregation or teacher unionization, in isolation. This investigation highlights suburban educational politics and explores how suburbanites confronted numerous challenges simultaneously as they worked to make good schools in their community.

Four groups of county residents emerged and sorted themselves into associations and activist organizations during the postwar decades: liberals, African Americans, conservatives, and teachers. Members of competing activist organizations defined good schools differently and employed different strategies to implement their preferences, including lobbying, electoral activism, petitioning at public hearings, and direct action such as protests and strikes. Cooperation between activists seemed possible initially, but over time the democratic mechanisms of pluralist educational politics helped cultivate suspicion in the minds of many citizens, splintering the consensus about the quality of the school system and prompting people to view public schools as a limited resource, with benefits available only to some, as opposed to a common good. In this way, the democratization of educational politics constrained what these suburbanites thought public schools could achieve and tempered their hopes for the future.

UNSATISFACTORY PROGRESS: THE PURSUIT OF GOOD  
SCHOOLS IN SUBURBAN AMERICA, 1940-1980

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
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of the requirements for the degree of  
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## Acknowledgements

One of the small pleasures of graduate school is reading the acknowledgements sections of monographs and unpublished dissertations. Although we strive for impersonal objectivity in our written work, these few pages with lowercase Roman numerals preceding the scholarship permit a peek behind the curtain at the human being whose years of effort are finally complete. They're such fun to read because they're always the same and they're always unique. Anyway, writing a dissertation is a solitary affair that cannot be completed without the assistance of many people, and I am thrilled to have the opportunity to write these pages acknowledging the shoulders I stand upon today.

I have been fortunate to work with incredibly bright, insightful, and generous historians on this project. My dissertation committee, including Robyn Muncy, David Freund, and Karen Kaufmann, provided valuable comments and criticism that transformed my thinking and served as the basis for a robust and engaging discussion during my oral defense. My co-advisors, Gary Gerstle and David Sicilia, each deserve their own special commendation. Gary always weathered my demands for his time and attention with calm affability, and from the very first day I set foot on campus he has been a constant source of support and guidance. David proved masterful at helping me find my way through this process, both intellectually and logistically, and for a historian who specializes in the cold, cruel world of business and economics he is remarkably attuned to the human concerns that shape our approaches to life and work. I cannot imagine a better pair of mentors for me, and I will forever be grateful for the important role they play in my life.

A historian can do no work without sources, and I am indebted to the people and institutions that made primary source materials available to me. In particular, I want to thank Jon Gerson at the Montgomery County Education Association; Cora Alter, David Eberly, William Offutt, Mark Simon, Bill Welsh, and Margaret Ziert, all of whom allowed me to examine documents from their personal collections; the more than two dozen former teachers and administrators who talked with me about their lives and experiences in the Montgomery County Public School System; the library staff at McKeldin and Hornbake Libraries at the University of Maryland, College Park; and the staff at the Montgomery County Historical Society. I want to award extra-special recognition to Rob Jensen, who served as the archivist for the Montgomery County Archives while I was gathering research for this project from 2007 to 2009. Rob took personal interest in my research and helped direct me to boxes of documents that I never would have thought to examine; he also made available to me some documents and printed materials that were not yet officially processed as part of the Archives. It is not an exaggeration to say that without his patience and assistance this project could not have been completed.

My years as a graduate student were made possible in large part because of the generosity of the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, based in New York City. Executive Director Lesley Herrmann approved the graduate assistantship that allowed me to work with public high schools in Maryland and Washington, D.C., on their history programs, and that work led me to focus on the history of suburban education in America for my dissertation research. Anthony Napoli, the Education Director of GLI, proved to be a fantastic liaison, supervisor, and mentor for me, and I

am very appreciative of his generosity and good cheer. I met and worked with many wonderful teachers and administrators at Paint Branch High School, Northwood High School, the School Without Walls, and Eleanor Roosevelt High School, and I thank them all for allowing me to help contribute to their educational communities. Joan Magin, at Eleanor Roosevelt, gladly assumed the role of friend and mentor to me, and I value her kind spirit and thoughtful nature.

I thoroughly enjoyed my experience as a graduate student in the Department of History at the University of Maryland, College Park, and for that I am thankful to everyone affiliated with the department. Many professors, including David Grimsted, James Gilbert, and Ira Berlin did more than they know to help me learn how to read, write, and think like a historian. Alison Olsen and Whit Ridgway teamed with Gary and Robyn to form the committee who shepherded me through my comprehensive exams, an exhausting but strangely exhilarating process. The administrative staff, including Darlene King, Catalina Toala, Courtenay Lanier and Jodi Hall, was incredibly supportive and helpful when dealing with all of the details that comprise life at a large public university. Ken Holum and Daryle Williams, as Directors of Graduate Studies, both provided insight and support at crucial moments that helped to shape the trajectory of my career.

And so I arrive at the most intimate and personal section: friends and family. My parents, Michael and Marianna Sullivan, have not done much, except provide unequivocal, unconditional, and unwavering love and support for my entire life. Frankly, I can't begin to describe the incalculable and unfathomable debt I owe them; I can only write that I love them and will forever be grateful, things I should probably

say to them in person more often. I shared my childhood with my sister Alexandra, and I am awed and humbled to observe the brilliant and generous woman she has become. She moved to D.C. while I was in graduate school, and our weekly visits were part of the rhythm of my life as I slowly pushed this dissertation toward completion.

All of the graduate students who passed through the History Department from 2002 to 2011 contributed in some way to the scholar that I have become. Sharing seminars, lounging on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of Key, arguing at the Cornerstone: there is something magical about being part of a community of graduate students, and I could name dozens of people who, in some small way, participated in my intellectual development. Of course, some of these people become a bigger part of my life and assumed the roles of close friends, intellectual sparring partners, and holiday cookout buddies. To Erik Christiansen, Tony Glocke, Claire Goldstene, Thanayi Jackson, and Kate Keane, I can only say thank you for making me a better historian, a better sports fan, a better friend, and a better person.

My daughter Avila delayed the completion of this dissertation by one year, and for that I couldn't be happier. Watching her grow up was, is, and will be an experience I treasure. And, finally, my wife Amy Widestrom gets the coveted last mention in the acknowledgements. We have been partners in love and life for fifteen years, and there is no one else I would rather walk alongside into the future. Her influence is everywhere in this dissertation, and in my life, and both are much better for it.



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**Introduction:  
Educational Politics in Postwar Montgomery County, Maryland**

In November 1981, angry citizens in Montgomery County, Maryland, accused the elected members of the School Board of “the systematic and purposeful destruction of a good school system.” Hundreds of people packed public hearings, wrote letters to the editors of local papers, and organized protests in their communities in opposition to School Board initiatives. School closures were the primary reason for the public’s outrage, but other Board decisions – to discontinue some programs, raise academic standards and increase instruction in “the basics” – were also unpopular. Ruth Harris, a resident of Silver Spring, commented “as a citizen living in Montgomery County, I am watching the actions by the local Board of Education with a sense of tragedy and sorrow.”<sup>1</sup>

Of course, there was another side to the story. A five-person majority on the seven-person School Board had been voted into office during the two previous elections: three members in 1978, two in 1980. The Board majority had not misled the electorate during the campaigns, and their decisions to close schools and discontinue programs in 1981 were consistent with their well-known educational philosophies. In other words, a majority of voters endorsed at the ballot box the same policies the organized protesters found objectionable. The tension simmering in the county as the 1980s began, regarding the definition of good schools and the best way to achieve them, was not surprising because disagreement about the trajectory of the county’s school system had become routine, part of the daily rhythm of life for these

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<sup>1</sup> *Washington Post*, “Letters to the Editor,” November 28, 1981, A22. Also see *Washington Post*, “Ombudsman,” January 25, 1982, A12; *Washington Post*, “Montgomery School Closings Stir Distrust, Anger,” November 29, 1981, B1; *Washington Post*, “Takoma Park’s High Level of Rage,” December 3, 1981, B1.

suburbanites. Everyone agreed that good schools were desirable, but people could not seem to agree on the meaning of educational excellence or the best way to reach that goal.

This dissertation tells the story of how educational politics – the public debates around contrasting notions of excellence and the policies intended to achieve it – became increasingly complicated and contested during the post-WWII decades. I demonstrate how the process of trying to improve schools led Montgomery County residents in unanticipated directions and constrained future educational aspirations. During the first half of the twentieth century, the state Democratic Party employed nepotism, patronage, and corruption to administer the Montgomery County Public Schools, and the school system enjoyed widespread support and universal acclaim. A new era began in the late 1940s when recent arrivals to the county instituted reforms replacing the state political machine with more democratic mechanisms of local control, allowing people to articulate and organize around educational philosophies influenced by attitudes about race, occupation, and political ideology. These groups of citizens came together to discuss the best way to achieve good schools, and their disagreements revealed important divisions among Montgomery County residents.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Wiebe, looking back at the discord of the 1960s, saw the “segmenting” of Americans as, ironically, evidence of unity. He argued that divisions within the population created a unique form of politics that mollified but never eradicated the lines separating groups of people from one another. It seems to me that the educational politics in Montgomery County might indicate something different: pursuit of the shared goal of good schools did more than maintain these divisions; it perhaps exacerbated them. Over time these divisions became firmer and the possibility of compromise or agreement decreased. Although Wiebe might suggest that the ongoing process of educational politics without a revolution might be evidence of unity, it seems possible that interest groups with intractable positions could paralyze the political process and engender pessimism among the population that a functioning polity is achievable. Robert Wiebe, *The Segmented Society: An Introduction to the Meaning of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975). Also see Mancur Olsen, *The Logic of Collected Action: Public Action and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965). Olsen points out that, in terms of participation, individuals will work hard for benefits that they believe will help their particular group, and less hard for benefits they believe to be widely

The divisions that appeared in Montgomery County developed within a consensual yearning for excellent public schools. This case study explores the tension between the shared desire for a good school system and the specific, competing desires of activists to define educational quality and influence educational policy. Four groups of county residents emerged and sorted themselves into associations and activist organizations during the postwar decades: liberals, African Americans, conservatives, and teachers.<sup>3</sup> Members of competing activist organizations defined good schools differently and employed different strategies to implement their preferences, including lobbying, electoral activism, petitioning at public hearings, and direct action such as protests and strikes. Cooperation between activists seemed possible initially, but over time the democratic mechanisms of pluralist educational politics helped cultivate suspicion in the minds of many citizens, splintering the consensus about the quality of the school system and prompting people to view public schools as a limited resource, with benefits available only to some, as opposed to a common good.

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shared. Interest groups are hard to remove once they have secured some benefits, and can in some cases wield control over the majority of the population due to their intense devotion to maintaining those benefits. Theodore Lowi discusses pluralism and interest group liberalism in *The End of Liberalism* where he suggests that pluralist politics changed the very meanings of “liberalism” and “capitalism” in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Theodore J. Lowi, *The End of Liberalism*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979) 31-41. Robert Dahl sees pluralism as a series of constantly-shifting alliances and opportunities for various minority groups to carve out positions of power for themselves within the governing apparatus, although he does not talk much about the potential effects that the political process might have on their attitudes about the efficacy of public institutions. Robert Dahl, *Who Governs?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961, 1974).

<sup>3</sup> Some people could count themselves as members of more than one group, like black liberals or conservative teachers. But even allowing for a certain amount of permeability in specific circumstances, the activist organizations created by liberals, conservatives, teachers, and African Americans tended to articulate distinct educational visions and focus on particular goals that seemed to belie the fact that a small number of people could have belonged to more than one group.

For example, in the 1970s African Americans worked to establish affirmative action policies that, they believed, would help black children succeed in Montgomery County Public Schools, but some white parents and teachers resented these programs and suspected that “special” attention paid to black students meant less attention given to whites. Teachers went on strike in 1968 to secure the professional compensation, autonomy, and input they felt they deserved, but some members of the public saw the illegal strike as an example of teachers looking out for themselves while abandoning the children. Conservatives accused liberals of wasting taxpayer dollars on experimental programs of questionable value, while liberals accused conservatives of the miserly view that a few saved tax dollars justified an inferior educational program. Perceived selfishness by members of the various activist groups made it seem as though everyone was focused on his or her own gain, as opposed to the overall good of the system. Educational politics may not have created the chasms separating people in Montgomery County, but it helped make them appear wider and less likely to be bridged.

This fracturing caused county residents to suspect that the spoils of victory for any particular activist group in the arena of educational politics came at the expense of other members of the community. In this way, the democratization of educational politics constrained what people in Montgomery County thought their public schools could achieve. In the 1940s there had been pervasive optimism about the schools; many county residents believed schools could do much more than merely provide instruction in the Three R’s. The potential of the public school system seemed almost limitless, and the wealthy and well-educated population in Montgomery County

seemed poised to develop and maintain a system that fulfilled every citizen's educational dreams. This did not happen because those dreams, as articulated by educational activists, came into conflict with one another in the messy and complicated world of local politics. The cumulative effect of victories and defeats, real and imagined, tempered expectations about the goals public schools could realistically aspire to reach.

Throughout the postwar era, these suburbanites viewed their schools as reflective of their prosperous and respectable community, and also as signaling the promise of college matriculation, an important mechanism for ambitious parents to position their families for continued success and membership in the upper strata of American society. The desire expressed by Montgomery County residents for excellent public schools was similar to that of millions of other Americans who moved to the suburbs during the postwar baby boom. The United States became a suburban nation during the second half of the twentieth century, and this spatial rearrangement of citizens had significant repercussions in American society.<sup>4</sup> Even

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<sup>4</sup> The growing scholarly literature on American suburbs demonstrates how suburban living affected the consumption habits, notions of citizenship, racial and economic attitudes, and sense of individual rights held by people who had made the move. For some examples of suburbanization affecting people's attitudes, see Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003); Gary Cross, *An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Jon C. Teaford, *City and Suburb: The Political Fragmentation of Metropolitan America, 1850-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1979); Barbara M. Kelly, *Expanding the American Dream: Building and Rebuilding Levittown* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic, 1987); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Matthew D. Lassiter, *Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); David M.P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy & White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

as scholars have typically noted that the promise of “good schools” helped to pull people into the suburbs, they have expended little effort to understand the reality of suburban schooling. Historians and other scholars have presumed there was agreement among suburbanites about the meaning of good schools, rather than view them as a dynamic and contested site where suburbanites argued for competing notions of quality and privilege. These different educational visions affected, and were affected by, opinions and concerns regarding race, professionalism, public employee unionization, taxation, and the role of government. The clashes over the meaning of good schools illuminate changing suburban attitudes in ways that scholars have failed to appreciate.

This story of local politics surrounding public schools is important because it reverberates with a broader narrative in postwar America of waning enthusiasm for actively using public institutions like schools to remedy social ills. At the national level, the transition from Great Society liberalism to limited government conservatism is one of the most significant political developments of the late twentieth century. Liberal legislative initiatives to solve problems were never universally favored, but during the mid-twentieth century moderates from both political parties agreed that government programs and public institutions could be engines of positive social change. The liberal center was challenged by groups like African Americans, left-leaning constituencies including organized labor, and conservative activists, each of whom pointed out specific liberal shortcomings and failures. Similarly, after presiding over a period of apparent consensus, liberals in Montgomery County lost control over the public schools because local blacks,

teachers (through their union), and conservatives developed sophisticated alternative visions of educational excellence.<sup>5</sup>

In this dissertation, I focus on the evolution of suburban educational politics, a surprisingly neglected topic in recent United States history and the history of American education.<sup>6</sup> Educational politics are a useful way to analyze citizen

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<sup>5</sup> Scholars have attributed this shift at the national level to liberalism's shortcomings and contradictions as well as to the emergence of an organized conservative movement. For studies discussing liberalism, see Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989); Alan Brinkley, *Liberalism and its Discontents* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Godfrey Hodgson, *America in Our Time: From World War II to Nixon What Happened and Why* (New York: Random House, 1978); Thomas Byrne Edsall with Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1991); Theodore Lowi, *The End of Liberalism: Ideology, Power, and the Crisis of Public Authority* (New York: Norton, 1969). On the rising conservative movement, see Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Richard White, "It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own." *A New History of the American West* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Jerome L. Himmelstine, *To the Right: The Transformation of American Conservatism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); Matthew D. Lassiter, *Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Educationists tend to focus on present-day issues like the achievement gap between students of different races, ethnicities, or economic backgrounds, or the performance of American students on standardized tests relative to students from other nations. Current debates about public education in the United States are, unfortunately, usually conducted with very little attention paid to how previous debates about schools may have affected the attitudes of present-day stakeholders. The scholars who do take a historical approach to education often note that the basic structures of American education look today largely as they did a century ago, and conclude that fundamental change is impossible or at least unlikely. See, for example, David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Jonathan Zimmerman, *Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Linda Symcox, *Whose History? The Struggle for National Standards in America's Classrooms* (New York: Teacher's College Press, 2002); David C. Berliner and Bruce J. Biddle, *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995); Paul D. Zoch, *Doomed to Fail: The Built-In Defects of American Education* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Press, 2004). Other scholars concede that things can and do change, but usually rely on simple theories like a pendulum swinging between two poles to comment on how new generations of reformers fill new bottles with old wine. Herbert Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum 1893-1958* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986); Alvin C. Eurich, ed., *High School 1980* (New York: Pitman, 1970); Hazel Whitman Hertzberg, *Social Studies Reform, 1880-1980* (Boulder: Social Science Education Consortium, 1981); Gerald Graff, *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts can Revitalize American Education* (New York: Norton, 1992). Some scholars split the difference and concede that there have been a few significant and transformational changes that have endured but a far greater number of temporary and faddish innovations that faded quickly. Larry Cuban, *How Teachers Taught: Constancy and Change in American Classrooms, 1890-1990* (New



attitudes because suburbanites valued education so highly and because schools are a government agency Americans are most inclined to think about at the local level.<sup>7</sup> As John Goodlad has pointed out, when it comes to public schools Americans “want it all” and see schools as empty vessels to be filled with any number of hopes, dreams, and ambitions for the future.<sup>8</sup> Historians of American education writing about the postwar decades often focus on specific topics, such as desegregation, teacher unionism, or the increased role of the federal government while paying less attention to how public school officials confronted such challenges simultaneously and with an

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York: Teachers College Press, 1993); Diane Ravitch, *The Schools We Deserve: Reflections on the Educational Crises of Our Time* (New York: Basic, 1985); Diane Ravitch, *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980* (New York: Basic, 1983).

<sup>7</sup> Neither “school” nor “education” is mentioned in the Constitution, and education has traditionally been a state issue administered at the local level. Despite the increased involvement of the federal government in educational matters in the decades after Sputnik, including the creation of the Department of Education in the late 1970s, the push for national standards in the early 1990s, and the No Child Left Behind act of the early 2000s, schools in many ways remain the quintessential local public institution. Deirdre Cobb-Roberts, Sherman Dorn and Barbara J. Shircliffe, eds. *Schools as Imagined Communities: The Creation of Identity, Meaning and Conflict in U.S. History* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006); Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970); Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980); Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience, 1876-1980* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Peter B. Dow, *Schoolhouse Politics: Lessons from the Sputnik Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); John I. Goodlad, *A Place Called School* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984); Gerald Grant, *The World We Created at Hamilton High* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Carl Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983); Herbert Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986); Frank W. Lutz and Carol Merz, *The Politics of School/Community Relations* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992); David Nasaw, *Schooled to Order: A Social History of Public Schooling in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Jerald Podair, *The Strike that Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Diane Ravitch, *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980* (New York: Basic, 1983); Linda Symcox, *Whose History? The Struggle for National Standards in American Classrooms* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002); David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Goodlad breaks down people’s educational desires into four broad categories: academic, social, moral, and vocational. He argues that in many cases a reform designed to address one category winds up diverting attention (and resources) from other areas, ensuring an ongoing state of reform and counter-reform. Goodlad, *A Place Called School*, Chapter 2, 38, for example.

eye on their particular local circumstances.<sup>9</sup> Education scholars also accept a simplistic liberal-to-conservative pendulum swing in national education trends during the late twentieth century without attempting to explain how and why this transition occurred, or the reciprocal ways it intersected with national politics more broadly. This dissertation emphasizes the cumulative nature of education reform and the importance of local context and history by showing how initiatives to improve schools were always shaped by memories of previous educational disputes. For instance, the conservative takeover of the Montgomery County School Board in 1962 affected the way liberals participated in subsequent elections, while the disappointing desegregation process in the 1950s influenced African American goals and strategies in the 1970s.

The efforts of this wealthy and highly-educated population in Montgomery County to make good schools are suggestive, if not necessarily representative, of

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<sup>9</sup> For some examples of this single-topic approach, see David C. Berliner and Bruce J. Biddle, *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995); Maurice Berube, *Teacher Politics: The Influence of Unions* (Westwood, CT: Greenwood, 1988); Don Cameron, *The Inside Story of the Teacher Revolution in America* (Lanham, MD: ScarecrowEducation, 2005); Steve Golin, *The Newark Teacher Strikes: Hopes on the Line* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Henry C. Johnson, ed., *Merit, Money, and Teacher's Careers* (New York: University Press of America, 1985); Carl F. Kaestle and Marshall S. Smith, "The Federal Role in Elementary and Secondary Education, 1940-1980" in *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 52 No. 4 (November 1982): 384-408; Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* (New York: Crown, 1991); Nicholas Lemann, *The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999); G. Gregory Moo, *Power Grab: How the National Education Association is Failing our Children* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1999); Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The NEA and the AFT, 1900-1980* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); Linda Symcox, *Whose History? The Struggle for National Standards in American Classrooms* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002). Also, scholars have largely ignored suburban education to focus on urban school systems, see Jerald Podair, *The Strike that Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience, 1876-1980* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Ronald P Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1991); Frank W. Lutz and Carol Merz, *The Politics of School/Community Relations* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992); David Rusk, *Inside Game Outside Game: Winning Strategies for Saving Urban Education* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999); Steven J.L. Taylor, *Desegregation in Boston and Buffalo* (Albany, NY: SUNY Albany Press, 1998).

similar conflicts over public education in other suburbs during the postwar decades. Like many suburbs, Montgomery County exemplified white middle-class prosperity, although its affluence was greater than some other suburban areas.<sup>10</sup> Unlike many suburbs that developed within a particular symbiotic relationship to the city they abut, the distinctive governmental organization of Washington, D.C., created a stark municipal barrier between city and suburb.<sup>11</sup> In contrast to other states, the twenty-three counties in Maryland each administer their own public schools, creating a somewhat unique situation where each county has its own government and school system.<sup>12</sup> The people who moved to Montgomery County during the postwar decades

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<sup>10</sup> Between 1940 and 1980 the county's population grew from around 84,000 people to almost 600,000, primarily due to migration by white professionals who were members of or aspirants to the middle class. Enrollment in Montgomery County Public Schools grew from around 15,000 in 1940 to a peak of 126,000 students in 1973. In 1960, Montgomery County ranked as the top county in the nation in terms of median family income and among the top dozen or so counties in annual per capita income. Also in 1960, twenty-six percent of county residents over the age of 25 had at least a college degree, and over seventy-one percent of residents had completed high school. Nationally, less than eight percent of the population over the age of 25 had a college degree, and only around twenty-five percent had a high school diploma. Montgomery County Archives (MCA), Board of Education Printed Materials, "Financing Public Education in Montgomery County," February 1964, 7, also Table 5, 8. Population and school enrollment figures for 1940 are from *The Government of Montgomery County, Maryland: A Survey Made at the Request of the Board of County Commissioners* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1941), 12, 73. 1980 population figure from the US Census; 1973 peak enrollment figure from MCA, Board of Education Printed Materials, "Public Education in Montgomery County, Maryland. An Orientation Report for the Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Charles M. Bernardo," 1975, 52.

<sup>11</sup> Washington, D.C., is not part of Maryland, and so the center/periphery framework of analysis that many scholars employ when discussing the growth of the suburbs does not apply as neatly in this particular context. In contrast to Charlotte, N.C., for example, as Matthew Lassiter discusses in *The Silent Majority*, the controversy over busing students to achieve racial integration in Montgomery County in the 1970s did not involve a "suburban area" populated by white middle-class residents within city limits and therefore susceptible to pairing in a busing program across town with an impoverished black ghetto. Matthew D. Lassiter, *Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), especially Chapters 5 and 6. Also see Kevin Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue, eds, *The New Suburban History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). The Introduction of this volume discusses the center/periphery approach to studying suburbs and cities.

<sup>12</sup> School systems in other states take various forms. In parts of New England single towns run their own "school systems" made up of a handful of elementary schools and a single junior high and high school. In many urban areas, like New York City or Los Angeles, a massive "school system" is run by a centralized bureaucracy overseeing the education of hundreds of thousands of students. In

were highly-educated white professionals who came to work for the federal government or affiliated institutions and agencies, and the “company town” aspect of Washington perhaps distinguishes Montgomery County’s population as somewhat exceptional.<sup>13</sup>

For all of its uniqueness, however, this county was in many ways similar to other growing suburban areas during the baby boom. Population growth necessitated school construction projects and prompted hundreds of teaching and administrative hires, spurring changes in planning policies and in the makeup of the professional workforce that occurred across the nation. The challenge of educating blacks and whites together after 1954 was a national struggle confronted by every school district in the country. During the 1950s, ‘60s and ‘70s, Montgomery County experimented with programs like “new math” and “open schools” and other progressive pedagogical and curricular innovations tried in countless other municipalities and suburbs.<sup>14</sup> The confluence of challenges in the 1970s, including the economic downturn, the end of the baby boom, the struggle with racial balance in schools, and

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other places municipal designations like “townships” and “counties” sometimes have school systems that overlap multiple areas, or have multiple school systems or districts in one area. Maryland’s system of twenty-three counties each with its own government and own school system is much easier and more straightforward to assess. Chapter 1 of this dissertation discusses how Montgomery County was the first in the state to establish a form of “home rule” with its own locally-elected legislature and School Board in the late 1940s.

<sup>13</sup> In many suburbs, federal contracts fueled the growth of corporate and public expansion outside of cities. Many suburban developments across the country were indirectly cultivated by the growth of the American state during the postwar decades, and although citizens elsewhere might not have been as consciously aware of this as people living in the shadow of Washington, the fact remains that in some respects their situations were similar.

<sup>14</sup> Another of these initiatives was the Man: A Course of Study (MACOS) anthropology course discussed by Peter Dow, one of MACOS’ creators, in *Schoolhouse Politics*. Dow notes that provincial attitudes and insistence of local control by parents and teachers stymied the implementation of the ambitious and somewhat controversial MACOS course. Montgomery County offered MACOS at a few schools during the early 1970s, and some members of the public objected in much the same way as Dow describes in his book. Peter Dow, *Schoolhouse Politics: Lessons from the Sputnik Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

the rising taxpayer's revolt reverberated in Montgomery County as they did elsewhere. Montgomery County may not represent every other suburb, but in many ways its experience seems reflective of other suburban experiences.

My focus on a specific time and place provides details and context about shifts in attitudes and priorities that national or trans-national approaches cannot. Observing the transition from optimism to uncertainty about public schools at the national level shows only the broad strokes of this transition; the dynamics are more easily visible in a specific location, especially because public schools are an institution people tend to think about in a local context.<sup>15</sup> The case-study approach also provides an opportunity to explore the motives and choices of individual activists and school officials, infusing the developing narrative with richness and giving these suburban characters an opportunity to be heard.

This dissertation makes extensive use of local sources and archives, many of which have been seldom used and, due to budgetary constraints and public indifference, may not be available to scholars in the future. The Montgomery County Archives, operated until 2010 by the Montgomery County Historical Society,

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<sup>15</sup> The publication of *A Nation at Risk* by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983 signaled the beginning of a new era in American educational history. The Commission concluded that America's schools were in dire straits and argued that reform was imperative. Scholars like Diane Ravitch joined the argument and suggested that the previous forty years of American educational history had pointed schools in the wrong direction and created the "rising tide of mediocrity" that the Commission warned was enveloping American education. Since the mid-1980s, the notion that America's schools are "in crisis" and in need of reform has motivated reformers from across the political spectrum. This story, however, is almost always told in national terms, as though "American education" is a universal and shared concept, while in fact at the local level the story about the shift in attitudes about public schools occurred in different ways, and at different moments. National Commission on Excellence in Education, United States Department of Education *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform: An Open Letter to the American People: A Report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1983); Diane Ravitch, *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980* (New York: Basic, 1983); David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

provided an abundance of source material for this dissertation including reports and printed materials, files of public officials, local newspaper clippings, transcripts from oral history interviews, and audio recording of public-affairs programming from the 1970s. Unfortunately, the Archives are now closed to the public and may never reopen, a fate faced by similar local archives across the country, and this dissertation is an example of a kind of history that can only be written with local sources.<sup>16</sup>

The two primary ways Montgomery County residents debated and determined the trajectory of their school system in the postwar decades were petitioning at public hearings and engaging in electoral politics. The first countywide activist organization dedicated to lobbying school officials appeared in 1944; School Board elections began in 1951. These two developments, I argue, changed educational politics in the county by initiating a never-ending cycle of tinkering toward the elusive goal of educational excellence.<sup>17</sup> The first four chapters of this dissertation discuss the

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<sup>16</sup> In addition to the Montgomery County Archives, there were four other types of sources that contributed to the completion of this dissertation. The *Washington Post* historical newspaper archive was invaluable; local papers, especially the *Montgomery County Sentinel*, bond paper copies of which were available at the paper's offices in Rockville, MD, were also useful. The Montgomery County Education Association (MCEA) does not maintain an archive but does have three very thick three-ring-binders of materials related to the teacher strike in 1968. These materials were compiled by a graduate student in 1974 and include newspaper articles, internal correspondence within MCEA, correspondence between MCEA and school officials, and other scraps of evidence. Without these binders, Chapter Four could not have been written. The University of Maryland holds several books and documents, some in McKeldin Library and some in the Maryland Room at the Hornbake Library, about Montgomery County that were very useful. Finally, I conducted about thirty open-ended oral history discussions with people who worked as teachers and administrators in MCPS during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, and their recollections often spurred me to pursue new lines of inquiry and, more importantly, provided some color and nuance to the educational story that was unfolding during my research.

<sup>17</sup> This analysis builds upon the framework established by David Tyack and Larry Cuban in their excellent synthesis *Tinkering Toward Utopia*. Tyack and Cuban argue that the pursuit of good schools in America is an unending cycle of reform, with citizens continually coming together to "fix" a never-ending series of perceived shortcomings. They note that, despite the fact that the public schools never seem to measure up to expectations, Americans seem unshaken in their optimism that the perfection is in fact attainable. David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995). Also, John Goodlad's *A Place*

emergence of four distinct groups of concerned citizens, their specific educational philosophies and strategies for implementing them, and the growing complexity of local educational politics.

Chapter One focuses on liberal activists who preferred a progressive educational program that cultivated within students the problem-solving skills and civic-mindedness needed to become responsible members of a democratic republic. They also believed in principles of scientific management and bureaucratic efficiency, and that schools could be a force for positive change in society. Like liberals elsewhere in the United States during the postwar decades, Montgomery County activists thought their educational philosophy was objectively superior to other approaches and were convinced that their educational prescriptions would create a universally beneficial school system. These liberals instituted two major reforms that transformed the county's educational politics: they organized themselves into the first countywide educational activist group, the Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations (MCCPTA), and they established local elections for the School Board. Somewhat ironically, this push for democratic participation was the first step towards greater public dissatisfaction about the public schools, as other interested groups of people took advantage of the democratic mechanisms to advance different visions of educational excellence.<sup>18</sup>

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*Called School* highlights the unreasonable expectations that Americans place upon their schools. Because Americans have such faith and optimism about what the public schools can achieve, they are routinely disappointed when the schools fall short of their hopes. John I. Goodlad, *A Place Called School* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984).

<sup>18</sup> The democratic mechanisms instituted by liberal activists provided an opportunity for other people to organize around their own educational philosophies. The reforms did not create the different opinions about education that divided people in Montgomery County, but they did give activists a new opportunity to organize and act on their differing educational visions. These different visions might

Chapter Two discusses the history of the segregated school systems in Montgomery County and the ongoing struggle by African Americans to improve the educational opportunities available to black children. Black leaders hoped to contribute to the development of the newly desegregated system after the 1954 *Brown* decision, and their educational vision focused on providing black children with an equal education to whites. This meant revisiting all aspects of the public school system, from hiring and administrative procedures to pedagogical strategies to disciplinary policies and codes of conduct, with a focus on racial equality. Members of the black community, including teachers, church leaders, and parents, believed the only way to achieve equality was to pay close attention to the needs of black children and design policies that addressed the years of inferior education they had received. Blacks were disappointed when their opinions were largely ignored by school officials and the most of the liberal activists who dominated the political scene in the mid-1950s. Instead of incorporating the blacks' vision into the process of desegregation, school officials prioritized white concerns about maintaining the educational status quo as much as possible, exposing the limits of the liberal educational attitude expressed by the MCCPTA. Many liberal whites believed the progressive educational program they supported would provide all children an equally good education, and thought that simply adding black children to the preexisting white school system was sufficient. Disappointment about the process of desegregation simmered in the minds of black educational activists for years afterward.

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have existed prior to the democratization of educational politics in the county, but the democratic process helped to expose and, perhaps, exacerbate the differences in the ways that people in Montgomery County thought about good schools.



Chapter Three discusses the increasing importance of electoral politics as conservative activists and organized teachers put forward their own visions of educational excellence. In 1962 economic and educational conservatives successfully linked economic appeals for lower taxes with educational appeals for more instruction in the Three R's and stunned local political observers by winning a majority of seats on the School Board. The liberals in the MCCPTA had endorsed candidates in the past, but the conservatives took the additional step of directly raising money and campaigning for a slate of candidates, an unprecedented level of electoral activism in county educational matters. The democratic mechanisms instituted by the liberals were co-opted by the conservatives, as was the powerful rhetoric of "good schools," which conservatives successfully appropriated to argue on behalf of the traditional curriculum and pedagogy they favored. Conservatives wove economic and educational ideas together during the campaign and convinced a majority of the public that prudent administrative cuts and a renewed emphasis on the basics would produce a superior public school system for everyone. In other words, the conservative appeal was not solely to the economic self-interest of the voters but also to their ongoing desire for excellent public schools. The liberals were dismayed by the election results and redoubled their efforts to petition at public hearings and participate in subsequent elections to make sure that their preferences would prevail.

Teachers were also dismayed when the conservative School Board majority voted to freeze salaries and eliminate planned hires as cost-cutting moves in 1963. Teachers realized they had no recourse to prevent the Board from implementing changes that affected teacher compensation and working conditions and, in their

minds, the overall quality of education in the schools. The teaching workforce changed in the postwar era, becoming younger and better-educated than teachers previously had been; the percentage of male teachers also increased significantly. These new teachers saw themselves as trained professionals, experts in teaching and learning whose compensation, autonomy, and decision-making input should be commensurate with their credentials and experience. In their view, the quality of the school system was directly linked to the degree to which teacher professionalism was respected by school officials and members of the community. Like the liberal activists, the teachers became more active in electoral politics, ensuring that future elections would be more spirited and hotly contested.

In 1965 leaders in the Montgomery County Education Association (MCEA) pushed the School Board to recognize the association as the representative body for teachers and grant the MCEA the right to exclusive professional negotiations of teacher contracts. Through these negotiations teachers hoped to advance their educational vision linking overall educational excellence with their own professionalism. When, in the winter of 1967-68, negotiations between teachers and the School Board reached an impasse, MCEA leaders chose to conduct an eight-day teacher strike that paralyzed the school system and legitimized the MCEA as a powerful activist group and a major player in educational politics going forward. However, the strike was simultaneously the beginning of a significant shift in public opinion about teachers. To many observers it marked a moment when teachers appeared to prioritize their own interests over those of the county's children. This strike and its aftermath are the subject of Chapter Four.

Chapter Five focuses on the 1978 election season, a moment when organizations representing the four major groups of concerned citizens each pursued their preferred vision of educational excellence and emerged unsatisfied with the electoral outcomes. Blacks fought to defend affirmative action policies that had been implemented in the mid-1970s after years of petitioning school officials. Teachers, intent on protecting their collective bargaining rights, vigorously opposed School Board policies concerning professional development requirements. Conservative activists pushed both for a tax-cap measure modeled on California's Proposition 13 as well as for a return to "the basics" and away from the progressive educational model that had, in their view, once again taken over the system. Liberal activists found themselves pulled in various directions, somewhat sympathetic to the goals of both blacks and teachers but also intent on preserving their own progressive educational vision and preventing the tax-cap measure from becoming law.

Chapter Five highlights how Montgomery County residents were divided by fundamental disagreements over the meaning of good schools and the way to achieve them. The distinct educational philosophies articulated by each group of activists overlapped in some respects but conflicted in others, creating an uncertain situation of shifting alliances and general anxiety about the future of the county's school system. The climactic election in November 1978 produced results that upset everyone and pleased no one; perhaps more importantly, the tumult of the election season that summer and fall inflicted wounds that took years to heal. By the early 1980s, some citizens were certain that the good school system was deliberately being destroyed while other citizens were convinced that the schools were finally on the right path.

Divisions in the county over educational philosophies had become practically insurmountable.

The complications wrought by increasingly complicated and contested educational politics did not cause county residents to give up their pursuit of good schools. Although they may have been less certain about the opportunities for success, and less united in their evaluation of the school system, their vigorous striving for quality did not wane. As members of activist groups perceived schools failing to live up to their educational philosophies, they redoubled their resolve and became more committed to petitioning and electioneering. Although the political process had lowered their expectations for public institutions somewhat, they remained buoyed by visions of good schools that were too important to abandon. Citizens in Montgomery County remained united in their desire for good schools even as the distinct educational philosophies articulated by various activist groups conspired to divide them.

But continued faith in public institutions like schools was by no means assured, and the story of educational politics in mid-century Montgomery County points to an uncertain future. This dissertation demonstrates the problems that developed as local educational politics became more complicated in one suburban county during the postwar era, including suspicions of selfishness, escalating fights over limited resources, contrasting visions of excellence buttressed by dire warnings about choosing the wrong path, and feelings of exhaustion at the never-ending cycle of elections and public hearings. These problems combined to increase anxiety about the present and future of the county's public schools, and in some respects, this

echoes a broader disillusionment with public institutions that many Americans felt as the twentieth century came to a close. Today public enthusiasm for public schooling is low, and governmental activism to solve problems is regarded skeptically.<sup>19</sup> The lines dividing various groups of people make it difficult to find points of agreement regarding ways to promote the general welfare. It seems as though the story of educational politics in Montgomery County from 1940 to 1980 might help us reexamine politics and public schools in the mid-twentieth century, and perhaps change the way we consider the future of public schooling in America.

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<sup>19</sup> For example, a June 2011 poll by Pew Research Center revealed that 47% of surveyed adults said that the education system in this country requires "major changes" and another 19% said it needed to be "completely rebuilt." Pew Research Center for the People & the Press Poll, June 2011.

**Chapter One**  
**“I just thought that we ought to choose our own people:”**  
**Liberal Educational Activists and the Dawning of a New Era**

In the spring of 1953 Edwin W. Broome, the Superintendent of Montgomery County Public Schools, announced his retirement; he died three years later, on April 12, 1956. A native of the county, Broome worked in the school system for forty-nine years, including thirty-six years as the Superintendent who single-handedly established MCPS as one of the best school systems in the nation. Local newspapers referred to him as “the grand old man of education” and his passion for teaching, learning, and public education inspired intense devotion and admiration from teachers and administrators as well as parents and other county residents. Broome was “the philosopher who took John Dewey out of his writings and put him to work in the classrooms of Montgomery County,” dedicating his entire life to improving education in his community. Thomas Pullen, the state superintendent whose tenure overlapped with Broome’s, commented that “the county, state, and nation are better because he lived.” In 1957 school officials named a newly constructed junior high school in his honor.<sup>1</sup>

Broome’s retirement and death occurred as a new political era was beginning in Montgomery County. Migration into the county and the baby boom instigated a period of tremendous growth and the once-rural county developed into a thriving and affluent suburb during the postwar decades. The good schools Broome labored to

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<sup>1</sup> Broome’s life and work will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. See Guy Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space: A History of Montgomery County Public Schools From 1732 to 1965* (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Public Schools, 1976), 274-276. Also see Katherine Greaney, ed., *Vistas: People and Events in the Growth of Montgomery County Public Schools* (Rockville, MD: Bicentennial Steering Committee of the Montgomery County Retired Teachers Association, 1976), 48-56.

build served as an important indicator of prosperity, respectability, and ambition for the thousands of white middle-class men and women who settled in the county.

These suburbanites tended to support the Dewey-influenced progressive educational philosophy that guided Broome's administrative choices, a philosophy that viewed public schools as an opportunity to teach children how to be inquisitive, responsible, and active members of a democratic republic. Broome emphasized experimentation and innovation and encouraged teachers and parents to think of school as a place where students learned critical thinking and social skills as well as the educational fundamentals. The new arrivals to the county, many of whom came to work for the federal government, saw public institutions like schools as a way to promote progressive change and solve societal problems. The well-regarded public school system was attractive to these liberals because it reflected their own educational vision and priorities, and yet upon their arrival many new residents sensed an uncomfortable tension simmering between the school system Edwin Broome built and the way he had built it.

During his tenure as Superintendent, Broome worked closely with E. Brooke Lee, the local facilitator of the state Democratic Party machine. Although the local School Board was nominally the governing authority of the system, in practice Broome wielded unchecked power. The local Board was appointed by the governor, a political ally of Lee's, and Board members deferred to Broome's judgment on all matters. He personally hired every teacher according to his own unwritten criteria, while Lee staffed some school system positions with political cronies. Broome worked with Lee to decide where to build new schools, driving development in

whatever direction suited them, often along the contours of Lee's own property holdings. Curricular and pedagogical initiatives conformed to Broome's personal preferences and opinions, and the schools budget was developed by the Superintendent on a scrap of paper according to his own speculation and estimates. There was very little public input or oversight in the ongoing administration of the school system; county residents simply trusted Broome's management and judgment. The public schools were part of a governmental apparatus that employed nepotism, patronage, and corruption to run smoothly, and Edwin Broome worked successfully within this atmosphere to build a school system with a very positive reputation.

The new arrivals to the county in the 1930s and 1940s liked the school system Broome was building but frowned upon the machine party politics that characterized day to day decision-making within the county's public institutions. In the tradition of Progressive Era reformers who saw increased democratic participation as a way to counter the power and influence of political machines, some county residents organized themselves and worked to change the way the county and school system were run. In so doing, they initiated a new political era in the county characterized by democratic pluralism and grassroots citizen activism. As the county developed into a thriving and prosperous suburb during the decades following World War Two and the school system grew to accommodate tens of thousands of new students, educational activists representing different groups of people within the county shared a desire for good schools and a willingness to work hard to achieve them. However, differences of opinion regarding educational philosophies and prescriptions separated various activist groups from one another, and over time their disagreements fractured the



consensus about the quality of Montgomery County's Public Schools that had existed during Edwin Broome's tenure.

Liberal middle-class professionals believing in direct democratic participation, scientific managerial principles, and the positive role public institutions could play in society led the initial wave of reform in the 1940s and 1950s. They organized themselves into activist groups, employed experts to study perceived problems, educated members of their community through newsletters and meetings, and used the electoral system to implement changes.<sup>2</sup> They were confident that their prescriptions for running the county's government and public schools were preferable to the spoils system and would produce superior institutions. In 1948 they established a county Charter that provided for an independent county government run by a locally elected County Council, effectively wresting control from the state Democratic Party machine controlled by Brooke Lee. Three years later, they established the first elected county School Board in Maryland and spurred the successful implementation of policies and procedures that emphasized merit-based hiring, efficient management and dispassionate professionalism among school administrators.

There were significant contradictions embedded in the reforms these activists worked to implement, and these tensions gradually pushed and pulled the school system in unanticipated directions. The impetus for reform was itself somewhat surprising because many of the people who worked for change had moved to Montgomery County because of the excellent reputation of its schools. The new

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<sup>2</sup> By 1955 the influence of local grassroots activism was being noted by the local media. *Washington Post*, "Civic Groups Play Big Role in County," May 15, 1955, L18. This article summarizes the numerous issues that groups like the Civic Federation had already played an "active part in securing many changes." Noted among these was the creation of an elected School Board.

arrivals liked the progressive educational program that prepared young citizens to be responsible and active members in a democratic republic, and yet they noticed that the schools themselves were run in a patently undemocratic fashion because School Board members were appointed by the governor and because there was no tradition of citizen participation at public hearings or School Board meetings. The liberal activists simultaneously believed that the school system was excellent and that it was being run unsatisfactorily, and they believed increased democratic participation would bring the schools closer to the people while maintaining the same progressive educational philosophy in the classrooms.

Also, some of their reform prescriptions were at odds with one another. Increased democratic participation in school affairs, through the establishment of an elected School Board and increased lobbying and petitioning by organized groups of educational activists, was uneasily fused with a preference for managerial professionalism and increased bureaucratization of school administration. Many of the new arrivals to the county were professionals with advanced degrees who came to the Washington, D.C., area to work for the federal government or affiliated institutions, and these people believed that their public school system should function according to the same principles of scientific management that governed their own workplaces. However, expressions of the popular will at the ballot box or at a public hearing were not guaranteed to line up with the choices made by dispassionate and objective school administrators, and policies administered within a rapidly-growing bureaucracy became harder for elected Board members to modify in response to public pressure. Over time this tension produced dissatisfaction in the minds of some

county residents who thought school officials were insufficiently responsive or, conversely, overly sensitive to the prevailing political winds.

Finally, and most significantly, the liberal reformers sought to codify local control of the school system because they thought that their own opinions on educational administration would produce superior schools. In addition to the progressive curricular and pedagogical initiatives, they also had strong opinions about all aspects of the school system, including financial allocation, long-term planning, and professional development. The liberals believed that their vision of a well-funded school system with a progressive educational program delivered by professional administrators in a scientifically-managed bureaucracy was an objectively superior way to organize a school system. They failed to anticipate how the democratic mechanisms of School Board elections and activist petitioning would allow other citizens to organize and articulate visions of quality education that were different from their own. In subsequent years African Americans, economic and educational conservatives, and organized public school teachers joined the ongoing public discussion about the county's school system. These people had different educational philosophies and visions, and different prescriptions for achieving them, and their activism produced increasingly contested educational politics in the county.

The liberal educational activists in the 1940s and 1950s were represented by an influential countywide coalition of Parent-Teacher Associations whose leadership was dominated by concerned parents. Members of the Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Association (MCCPTA) cared about education and correctly assumed that their passion for a strong school system was shared by an overwhelming

majority of the county's population. Good schools were an important signifier of social status and a direct way to ensure that children in Montgomery County could aspire to material and social success in the future. In this respect, Montgomery County was similar to thousands of other suburban areas in the United States during the decades following World War Two. Migration to the suburbs occurred for many reasons including the desire for home ownership at a distance removed from the overcrowded cities, but an important pull factor was the promise of good schools, defined as a public institution that reflected the hopes, dreams, and values of the community and provided children with the opportunity to grow and become productive and successful citizens. In some places there was a racial component to the desirability of suburban schools as upwardly-aspiring whites sought schools and communities with fewer black people, and this was somewhat true in Montgomery County, where restrictive covenants, redlining, and other unofficial but widely understood policies and attitudes held by white homeowners and renters kept black families from moving into the county until the late 1960s.<sup>3</sup>

Millions of Americans moved to the suburbs in the postwar decades, and this migration coincided with a baby boom that added thousands of children to suburban school systems every year. During the 1950s, school enrollment in Montgomery County increased annually by about five thousand students, and an average of 228

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<sup>3</sup> Even after restrictive covenants were deemed illegal, it was very difficult for black families to move into Montgomery County. Homeowners and renters operated within a commonly-accepted and understood situation where selling or renting to black families were discouraged. As white families moved into Montgomery during the postwar era, the black population remained largely stagnant, decreasing its size, in terms of percentage of total residents. By 1960, the county was only around 3 percent black, down from seventeen percent in 1930. The history of the black school system and the process of desegregation after *Brown* will be discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation. The liberal reformers who worked to change the way public schools were run during the 1940s were focused exclusively on the white school system.

new classrooms were added each year as MCPS constructed new school buildings.<sup>4</sup> Similar school system growth patterns occurred all across the country, coinciding with housing developments and strip-mall construction to accommodate the millions of new suburbanites. The school system in Montgomery County was funded primarily through the local property tax, and during the postwar decades the public school budget regularly accounted for more than half of the county's overall operating budget, by far the largest single area of expenditures.<sup>5</sup> Although county residents had a long history of supporting public education, educational politics took on new urgency during the postwar decades as unprecedented school system growth coincided with migration into the county by families determined to implement a liberal educational vision.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Public school enrollment grew from 17,372 students in 1946 to 86,494 in 1961. Montgomery County Archives (MCA), Board of Education (BOE) Printed Materials, "Financing Public Education in Montgomery County," February, 1964, Table 2, 5. During this time period, private school enrollment grew at about the same rate. About 19 percent of the county's students were enrolled in private schools. Also see MCA, BOE Printed Materials, "Financing Public Education in Montgomery County," February, 1964, 9 for the school construction numbers. By 1960, the county operated in the 118 schools, up from 66 in 1940. "A Lay Citizens Report on Curriculum," Final Report, Volume 1, August 1961, 17. McKelden Library, University of Maryland, College Park. Also see MCA, County Council Printed Materials, Annual Reports, Annual Report 1963, 68.

<sup>5</sup> The county's Annual Reports often published a pie-chart or some other graphic representation of the county's budget, and the largest slice of revenue was always local property taxes while the largest expenditure was always the public school system. For example, see MCA, County Council Printed Materials, Annual Reports, 1963 Annual Report, 68. Also see the figures for FY 1960 cited in MCA, BOE Printed Materials, "Financing Public Education in Montgomery County," February 1964, Table 8, 12.

<sup>6</sup> The history of Montgomery County Public Schools prior to WWII is discussed in *From One Room to Open Space*. There are a few colorful anecdotes involving local political disputes spilling over into school system maintenance, such as when the local board was locked out of its own building by county commissioners who were angry that the Superintendent had been replaced. Guy Jewell, the author, leans heavily on old newspaper articles and school board minutes to create a thorough, if exhausting, narrative that, in his view, proves how dedicated county residents were to the concept of quality public education. However, until the arrival of Edwin Broome in the second decade of the twentieth century, the school system's history seems unremarkable and the politics surrounding education seem docile or nonexistent. Broome's firm hand modernized and grew the school system, setting the stage for the migration into the county that would spur the creation of a new era in educational politics that was much more contentious than ever before. Guy Jewell, *From One Room to*

For most of the nineteenth and early twentieth century the county was mostly rural with a few small towns separated by vast tracts of farmland where wheat, corn, tobacco, and other crops were grown, along with space for cattle, sheep, and hogs.<sup>7</sup> The county was effectively divided into two regions: the down-county region clustered close to the Northern and Western borders of Washington, D.C., and the much larger up-county region that extended for miles of rolling hills and open space. During the early twentieth century, the down-county area began to attract more residents as towns like Bethesda, Silver Spring, Chevy Chase, and Takoma Park grew and established themselves as nascent suburbs thanks to the development of paved roads and light railways.<sup>8</sup> Between 1910 and 1940, the county's overall population almost tripled, from around 32,000 residents to just under 84,000, but the down-county area grew even faster, from around 8,000 to about 55,000.<sup>9</sup> As the county's overall growth continued after World War Two, passing the half-million mark in the early 1970s, the county filled up from the District line northward, with the suburban area growing more and more densely populated as it expanded all the way past the once-isolated county seat of Rockville, over twenty miles from the northwest border of Washington.

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*Open Space: A History of Montgomery County Schools From 1732 to 1965.* (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Public Schools, 1976).

<sup>7</sup> Ray Eldon Hiebert and Richard K. MacMaster, *A Grateful Remembrance: The Story of Montgomery County, Maryland* (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Government and Montgomery County Historical Society, 1976), 124-125, 241.

<sup>8</sup> *The Government of Montgomery County, Maryland: A Survey Made at the Request of the Board of County Commissioners* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1941), 12. Hereafter referred to as "Brookings Report."

<sup>9</sup> Brookings Report, 12. The exact figures: in 1910, the county's population was 32,089 with 8,324 living in District 7, which included Bethesda and Chevy Chase, and District 13, which included Wheaton and Silver Spring. In 1940, the total county population was 83,912, with 54,991 living in the down-county districts.

Migration into the county was spurred by the growth of the federal government and concurrent growth of affiliated institutions like law firms, corporations and nonprofit agencies. As the American state grew during the twentieth century the neighboring suburban areas expanded as scientists, engineers, doctors, lawyers, and other professionals began relocating to the area.<sup>10</sup> Many of these new arrivals chose to buy homes and settle in developing towns in the down-county region of Montgomery County. These people tended to be well-educated and ambitious white people from New England, the mid-Atlantic, and the Midwest, and they held attitudes and aspirations that differed somewhat from the longtime county residents who continued to farm in the up-county region further from the city. Montgomery County was a place where the new arrivals could buy a home, raise a family, and fulfill the American Dream. Sending their children to an excellent public school was an important part of that idealized vision of middle-class life in the suburbs. The new arrivals, many of whom earned their living from the government, were liberals who had faith in public institutions like schools and saw quality public institutions as indicative of a society pointed toward progressive improvement.<sup>11</sup> Although the people who moved to Montgomery County may have been better

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<sup>10</sup> According to the US Census, by 1960 27.3 % of the employed population in Montgomery County was “professional, technical, and related,” while an additional 14.1 % identified themselves as “managers, officers, and proprietors,” and another 19.5% worked in “clerical or related” occupations. Sixty percent of the population worked in some kind of white-collar profession, while another 9% worked in sales. Figures cited in MCA, BOE Printed Materials “Financing Public Education in Montgomery County, 1965-1970,” Appendix A, Table 2.

<sup>11</sup> The Brookings Institution undertook a comprehensive study of Montgomery County’s government in the late 1930s; this study will be discussed later in the chapter. According to that report, issued in 1941, “the high cultural and educational level of the residents of the county and the relatively large wealth of the county provide the resources and capacity for a high type of government and for thoroughly adequate public services.” There was little doubt, in the minds of the Brookings officials or in the minds of the county residents, that “thoroughly adequate” was the bare minimum that would be acceptable. Brookings Report, 15.

educated and wealthier than the people who moved to other suburban communities elsewhere in the United States, and although their educational vision may have had specific points of emphasis that differed from people in other places, in their professed desire for educational excellence they were similar to millions of other postwar families who bought homes in the suburbs.

Some of these new arrivals chose Montgomery County over living in the District or in other counties in Maryland or Virginia because of Montgomery's school system.<sup>12</sup> The county was the first in the state to offer kindergarten, establish a junior college, and develop ancillary programs like school nurses, cafeterias, and libraries. The system attracted national attention in the 1930s and 1940s from some colleges and universities who had noticed the caliber of students graduating from Montgomery County Public Schools.<sup>13</sup> Leslie Morgan Abbe, who moved to the Washington, D.C. area with his wife Opal and their small children in 1941 to take a job with the Congressional Budget Office, settled on Montgomery after meeting with Superintendent Edwin Broome.<sup>14</sup> Abbe somewhat resembled Robert McNamara with

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<sup>12</sup> One of these was Norman Christeller, who chose Montgomery over Arlington when he moved to the area in the late 1940s. After returning from the war Christeller used the G.I. Bill to complete his college and purchase a home in Montgomery County; he later worked for the Commerce Department. Christeller later stated he moved to Montgomery County because of the school system, and even moved from one area of the county to another so his son could attend a particular high school, Walter Johnson, that Christeller liked. Transcript of Oral History with Norman Christeller, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 2, 12-15.

<sup>13</sup> Mary Mohler, who worked as the college counselor at Bethesda-Chevy Chase high school in the 1930s and 40s, stated that B-CC was listed among the top 10 high schools in the country. She also noted that colleges would contact her, based on the school's reputation, to see if she would steer students to their colleges. Transcript of Oral History with Mary Mohler, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 8. In 1946 *Look* magazine included the Montgomery County Public School System among its top 100 of America's best schools, one of only 8 county school systems in the USA, out of 3,600, to be so recognized. See "1946 Democratic Platform for Montgomery County." MCA, RG 18, MCCC, Box 1, Folder: November-December, 1946.

<sup>14</sup> Abbe sat for an oral history interview conducted by the League of Women Voters in the 1970s, see MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 1, 1-2. Also see a newspaper clipping contained in the



his slicked-back hair, wire-rimmed glasses, and unwavering faith in scientific managerial principles. He was a typical new arrival to the county, an ambitious and determined “man of action” who became very involved in local politics by joining or creating associations and committees to work for improvements to the county’s government and its school system. The school system’s strong reputation helped attract people like Abbe, members of or aspirants to the middle class who placed a premium on education and were determined to work hard to make sure their public institutions were as good as possible.<sup>15</sup>

These new residents encountered a county where the government and school system were administered locally by officials appointed by the governor.<sup>16</sup> By law, all of the counties in Maryland were independent entities only insofar as state government allowed them authority over specific matters, and until the 1940s the state legislature and governor ceded very little control to the counties.<sup>17</sup> For decades, the governor’s man in Montgomery County was E. Brooke Lee, the heir to a local political dynasty who ran the local Democratic Party machine in the county while

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transcript of the oral history, *Rockville Gazette* “Gala Planned to Mark Civic Activist Abbe’s 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday,” May 25, 1988, 18, notes that Abbe was “a man of action” who set to work establishing the elected School Board shortly after he arrived in the county.

<sup>15</sup> Abbe himself did not have an advanced degree, although he did do graduate work at the University of Cincinnati, Columbia University, and American University. Brookings researchers noted that by 1940 “a relatively small proportion of the county’s residents are engaged in agriculture even though over 70 per cent of its land is in farms.” The report also noted that a “large number of persons” were engaged in public service and in professional service, creating in the county “an unusually large number of educated and intelligent residents.” The county’s population was “considerably above average” in terms of literacy rates. Brookings Report, 12-13.

<sup>16</sup> There were some positions that were elected locally, including some members of the Board of County Commissioners, the legislative body in the county. However, because the Democratic Party machine in the state wielded such influence the results of these local elections mirrored the preferences of state party officials. Moreover, the locally-elected bodies had very little power of their own and mostly acted as an administrative arm of the state.

<sup>17</sup> Brookings Report, 7.

holding a series of positions in Annapolis.<sup>18</sup> Lee's father, Blair Lee, had been a delegate to the 1896 Democratic National Convention, State Senator, and later Maryland's first popularly elected U.S. Senator in 1913. While serving in the State Senate, Blair Lee helped shepherd through an amendment to the state constitution that mandated the General Assembly surrender the authority to pass local legislation to a County Council if a majority of voters within a county elected to form their own county government.<sup>19</sup> No Maryland county established its own independent government until 1942, when citizens in Montgomery County like Leslie Abbe, unsatisfied with the political machine controlled by Brooke Lee, organized to do so.<sup>20</sup>

Brooke Lee dropped out of Princeton in 1913 to work for his father as a legislative assistant on Capitol Hill, and later served in a National Guard unit that traveled to France in 1917. Upon his return from the war he was quickly drafted by the state Democratic Party to run for state comptroller in 1919, and his political connections and natural charisma helped him organize support for a ticket headed by Albert Ritchie, the candidate for governor. The ensuing electoral victory established Lee as a political force and he proved adept at rounding up votes and doling out favors. For the next two decades Lee held various positions in state government,

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<sup>18</sup> Lee served as Speaker of the House of Delegates beginning in 1926; before this, he had been elected county comptroller in 1919, and was appointed Maryland secretary of state in 1923. The specific position that Lee held in Annapolis was not terribly important; his ability as a campaigner, party organizer, and, for want of a more elegant word, "boss" were his real skills. Heibert and MacMaster, *A Grateful Remembrance*, 263-64. Also, many of the oral histories taken as part of the League of Women Voters project in the 1970s, confirm this portrait of Lee, not least Lee's own lengthy oral history.

<sup>19</sup> This amendment was ratified by the voters in Maryland in 1914, while Blair Lee was serving in the U.S. Senate.

<sup>20</sup> Heibert and MacMaster, *A Grateful Remembrance*, 262.

including a stint as Speaker in the House of Delegates.<sup>21</sup> He developed a mutually beneficial relationship with Ritchie, who served as governor from 1920 to 1935. Ritchie relied on Lee to help move legislation through the General Assembly and in return he deferred to Lee's judgment when it came to appointments for local positions in Montgomery County like the county School Board and other offices.<sup>22</sup>

Suburban development in the down-county area was top priority in Montgomery during the 1920s and 1930s, and Lee was particularly well-positioned in his role as a leader of the local party machine because he had common interests with both the rural, up-county residents who had lived in Montgomery for generations and the down-county suburbanites who were more recent arrivals. Lee held large amounts of land, like the farmers in the up-county areas, which meant that Lee had a personal interest in keeping property taxes low.<sup>23</sup> But much of Lee's land was in the down-county area, where the new residents were settling, and he was personally invested in promoting growth and development there. One of his signature accomplishments was the construction of the East-West Highway, begun in 1928 and completed in 1933, connecting Bethesda to Silver Spring and Takoma Park and improving transportation along the towns bordering Washington, D.C.<sup>24</sup> Lee and his

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<sup>21</sup> Lee's life and career are widely known within local circles in Montgomery County. He sat for a lengthy oral history interview in the 1970s and related a colorful autobiography, see MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, Folder 2, 10-16 for discussion of his entrance into politics after WWI. All of the other oral histories taken as part of the League of Women Voters oral history project in the early 1970s confirm Lee's role as a "Party Boss." Also see Heibert and MacMaster, *A Grateful Remembrance*, 263-265.

<sup>22</sup> Heibert and MacMaster, *A Grateful Remembrance*, 264.

<sup>23</sup> Lee also benefited from the fact that many up-county residents were longtime residents of the county who remembered his father's political career and were inclined to support the Lee family.

<sup>24</sup> The East-West Highway was the first "belt-line" around Washington, connecting the growing suburban communities to one another; previously, to get from Bethesda to Silver Spring by

cronies oversaw the paving of various dirt roads in the down-county area; road paving was a favor that Lee could bestow upon or withhold from a citizen depending upon his or her commitment to the Democratic ticket.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to transportation improvements, Lee was sensitive to other concerns of the new suburbanites, including their desire for good schools.<sup>26</sup> In this arena, the careers of Lee and the Superintendent of Schools Edwin Broome formed neat parallel trajectories. Broome was appointed in 1917 and served as Superintendent for more than thirty years. Lee let Broome run the school system as he pleased, and the Superintendent happily operated within a loose, informal, and unstructured governmental apparatus that afforded him substantial control over day-to-day operations. The School Board in Montgomery County, like all of the other counties in Maryland, was appointed by the governor, and, because of Lee's relationship Governor Ritchie, these local appointments were effectively controlled

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car a person had to drive into the District and back out. The Highway's meandering path was due to natural contours of the land – or, perhaps, as some claimed, the gradual curves followed the contours of Brooke Lee's land holdings. Heibert and MacMaster, *A Grateful Remembrance*, 283.

<sup>25</sup> Allen Gardner, who wound up leading the push for the Charter form of government which would overthrow Lee's machine, recalled later that when his street was paved the workers also paved his driveway, free of charge, which Gardner interpreted as an early attempt to win over his allegiance. Despite this, Gardner's philosophical belief in home rule, local democratic elections, and good government led him to reject this overture and organize against Lee. See transcript of Oral History of Allen Gardner, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 2, 12-13.

<sup>26</sup> In 1949, the Montgomery County Civic Federation undertook a study of the Junior College, which had been founded 3 years earlier. This study, which included a survey of income levels of families and also a survey of high school seniors about their future plans, indicated that the wealthiest citizens in the County lived in the suburban ring, and also that among these residents there was an overwhelming expectation that their children attend college of some sort. This seems to indicate both that the junior college program be expanded, and also that the secondary schools be geared towards college preparatory, with concurrent curricular and extracurricular improvements. "Report to the Montgomery County Civic Federation on Montgomery Junior College," May 9, 1949, 4. MCA, RG 18, Series III: Committees, Box 2, Folder: Schools.

by Lee, and by extension, Broome himself.<sup>27</sup> Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Lee and Broome were effective and successful leaders. The County grew and attracted new residents while the school system expanded and modernized. Lee and Broome were perhaps too successful at cultivating a prosperous and flourishing suburban community in Montgomery County, because the reputation of that community attracted the new residents who pushed for reforms and wrested control from Lee and Broome, transforming the way the county government and school system were run.

On the one hand, Lee used his influence in Annapolis to steer favorable legislation and appropriations towards Montgomery County, and this benefited many county residents. He was approachable and accessible, joined many organizations within the county, and did what he could to provide services like roads and schools while keeping taxes low. His success in these endeavors laid a foundation of infrastructure and growth patterns that set the stage for the county's prosperous growth during the second half of the twentieth century. On the other hand, everyone knew that Lee was the boss of a political machine that employed corruption, nepotism, and patronage to fill positions and run local agencies. To take one example, a position with the title "Supervisor of School Property" hired and managed the janitors, groundskeepers, bus drivers, and others who maintained the school system's physical plants. This position was filled by one of Lee's cronies or relatives, which oftentimes meant the Supervisor had scant interest or ability in long-term planning or short-term building maintenance. There were rumors that janitors and

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<sup>27</sup> In Maryland, each of the twenty-three counties, and Baltimore City, which is a county-equivalent, operates its own school system. Because public school jurisdictions are determined on a state-by-state basis, other states can have several school districts within an incorporated county, or have school districts which can include several counties.

bus drivers were fired for not sufficiently supporting the party during elections.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, while Lee's influence in Annapolis may have benefited all county residents it also enriched Lee himself. His property holdings in the down-county area dramatically increased in value as state appropriations allowed roads like Wisconsin Avenue and Georgia Avenue to be paved and widened to promote transportation to and from Washington D.C.

There was a widespread understanding that political deal-making and palm-greasing turned the wheels of government in Montgomery County. This situation was less objectionable to the long-term county residents, who mostly lived in the rural up-county region, because it reflected the accepted status quo. Lee's family had a history of political leadership in the county, and as was the case in most Southern states, intra-party politics among the Democrats had long determined who controlled the state legislature. As long as people got the services they wanted there was not much philosophical concern about how democratic, merit-based, or professionally-run the local governmental apparatus was. However, many new arrivals were not accustomed to this way of doing things and had different ideas about what they expected from their public institutions. These liberals worked to wrest control of county government from the Lee machine and establish an independent county government. Their prescription for reform was grounded in calls for good government and home rule, directly challenging the corrupt Lee regime in Annapolis.

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<sup>28</sup> Leslie Abbe, who founded the Montgomery County Council of PTAs and led the fight to establish the elected School Board in the late 1940s, levied the allegations of janitorial firings in an oral history interview, see MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 1, 4. The position of Supervisor of School Property would prove to be key during the push for an increasing professional educational bureaucracy, as the physical condition of schools helped to unite members of the PTAs around the idea of reform.

After successfully implementing a new county Charter in 1948, some of the liberal reformers, including Leslie Abbe, turned their attention to the public school system. The loose and informal school system apparatus run by Edwin Broome looked very similar to Lee's political machine and was criticized along similar lines. Abbe and other educational reformers organized themselves into committees and associations to push for home rule in the form of direct election of School Board members, and for good government by way of objective and merit-based hiring policies and professional management of the administrative hierarchy. Because the reforms to the school system were undertaken shortly after the establishment of the Charter and because the reform prescriptions were similar to those articulated by the Charterites, the reforms instituted by the liberal educational activists seemed in some ways to be a logical next step.

Edwin Broome was born in Darnestown, Montgomery County, Maryland, on March 26, 1885. He began teaching elementary school in September of 1904, a few months after his graduation from secondary school. Although Broome earned an LL. B and B.A. from George Washington University, he was appointed assistant superintendent in 1908 and acting superintendent in 1916 before earning either degree. Beginning in 1922, he taught a summer session course in education at the University of Maryland, and in 1945 the university awarded him an honorary Doctor of Letters when he was sixty years old; thereafter he was commonly referred to as Dr. Broome in Montgomery County.<sup>29</sup> Broome served as Superintendent for more than

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<sup>29</sup> Although Broome had limited experience and meager credentials when he was placed in charge of the school system at age 31, his appointment was actually a small step towards emphasizing professionalism and merit-based criteria among school administrators. Throughout the nineteenth century the School Board had chosen prominent local citizens – preachers, lawyers, and the like – to

thirty-five years, a tenure that none of his successors would come close to approaching, and during his reign the School Board served as little more than a rubber stamp for Broome's own preferences regarding how the system should be run.<sup>30</sup>

Broome was devoted to the philosophy and writings of John Dewey, and his application of Dewey's ideas took two forms.<sup>31</sup> From a philosophical standpoint, Broome endorsed a progressive educational vision that stressed a direct connection between the educational program and the maintenance and development of a democratic society. In the 1930s and 1940s, Broome contrasted his preferred educational program that stressed "understanding, investigation, assembling of facts, free discussion, and practice in making choices and decisions" with the "memorization of a dictated code" and "perfecting precision in conformity" that

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serve as Superintendent, as opposed to people with experience in teaching or education. Longtime MCPS employee Guy Jewell recounts the history of the school system from the founding of the county in 1776, and describes the appointments of various Superintendents, none of whom (before Broome) was anything close to a "professional educator." Guy Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space: A History of Montgomery County Public Schools From 1732 to 1965* (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Public Schools, 1976), 274-276. Also see Katherine Greaney, ed, *Vistas: People and Events in the Growth of Montgomery County Public Schools* (Rockville, MD: Bicentennial Steering Committee of the Montgomery County Retired Teachers Association, 1976), 48-56.

<sup>30</sup> Broome was appointed acting Superintendent in 1916. Although in this era the barriers to administration were not very stringent, in 1916 the state of Maryland revised the laws regarding public schools to require that Superintendents hold certain qualifications. *Handbook for Teachers*, (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Education Association, 1950), 5. Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park. It was not until December 1917, when Broome completed the last class at George Washington required for his LL. B degree, that he was officially confirmed as the Superintendent. He retired in 1953. See transcript of oral history with Guy Jewell, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 18.

<sup>31</sup> Upon his retirement, Broome's career was recalled by Florence Massey Black in the *Maryland Teacher*. Black's essay was reprinted in Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space*, 274-275. Jewell recounts this sentiment in a slightly different way: that Broome could "out-Dewey Dewey." Jewell oral history transcript, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 24.



characterized education in dictatorial societies.<sup>32</sup> The top priority for the school system was to “develop the techniques of Democracy in the belief that all techniques have to be learned by each generation as a social attainment.”<sup>33</sup> This meant even elementary school instruction was conducted in such a way as to emphasize the usefulness of basic educational lessons to a young citizen in a democratic society. The creeping threat of dictatorship on the global stage in the 1930s and 1940s served to reinforce the notion that democratic progress was not inevitable and that students in the United States had to be instructed in the skills that would allow them to maintain their free and open society.<sup>34</sup>

Broom believed that a comprehensive educational program was necessary to prepare future citizens. He established junior high schools in 1925, a countywide 12-year graded educational program, and the Montgomery Junior College in 1946, all firsts in the state of Maryland.<sup>35</sup> Montgomery was also years ahead of other counties

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<sup>32</sup> *Of the Children*, (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Board of Education, 1941), 1. Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park.

<sup>33</sup> *Of the Children*, (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Board of Education, 1941), 7. Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park.

<sup>34</sup> Montgomery County’s teachers agreed that schools were a vital part of the foundation of a democratic society. In 1950, the Montgomery County Education Association published its handbook for teachers and in addition to stating unambiguously that “the child has an important place in our democracy and should be equipped spiritually, emotionally, physically, and intellectually to contribute his share to the society to which he belongs,” also included a political cartoon with a pillar labeled “democracy” standing atop a support block labeled “free public schools,” with the caption “lest we forget.” *Handbook for Teachers* (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Education Association, 1950), 2, 55. Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park.

<sup>35</sup> The State of Maryland did not require junior highs until 1947. *Handbook for Teachers* (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Education Association, 1950), 6. Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park. The junior college opened in 1946 with 185 students, most of whom were WWII veterans. Three years later, there were 427 students, only around 40% of which were vets. Thus it became clear that the junior college was filling a need for education beyond the 12<sup>th</sup> grade for more than just returning vets, and Montgomery Junior College grew quickly. “Report to the Montgomery County Civic Federation on Montgomery Junior College,” May 9, 1949, 1. MCA, RG 18, Series III: Committees, Box 2, Folder: Schools. Broome considered the educational program as

in developing school libraries and was the first county in the state to provide kindergarten for all students.<sup>36</sup> Thomas Pullen, who served as state Superintendent for many years during Broome's tenure, noted that Broome believed that "everyone wants to know; in a democracy everyone has a right to know to the best of his capabilities; and the public must of a necessity and in enlightened self-interest provide those opportunities."<sup>37</sup> In Montgomery County, supporters of a democratic ideal did not assume that "their own fervent belief in the democratic way is sufficient to make it function," but instead appreciated that democracy could only be sustained through continuous education in democratic "techniques" in the schools.<sup>38</sup>

Broome recognized that these techniques could change over time and insisted on a "continuous reconstruction" of the educational program to help it "keep pace

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being one continuous program from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. In keeping with the usual "social studies" curriculum that came into fashion during the Progressive Era, the county social studies curriculum developed from elementary school through secondary school, gradually introducing students to larger and more complex forms of society. Elementary students learned about the family, small communities, and so on, and then middle school students were introduced to the progress of mankind, and high schoolers studied institutional living and finally American Democratic Living. *Of the Children*, (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Board of Education, 1941), 17. University of Maryland, Hornbake Library, Maryland Room. The social studies program, and its effort to connect students of all ages to the world and society at large, is also discussed in *These Are Your Schools* (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Board of Education, 1954), 26-29. Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park. For a more general discussion of social studies curricula see David Jenness, *Making Sense of Social Studies* (New York: Macmillan, 1990).

<sup>36</sup> There is conflicting evidence as to when the kindergartens were established. The brief history included in the 1950 MCEA Handbook for Teachers puts the date as 1936, while in an oral history Guy Jewell said that in fact kindergarten had begun a decade earlier, in 1926. Whenever the first one was established, they were not universally adopted in the county until just after WWII, which was still before the state of Maryland mandated kindergartens in all counties. *Handbook for Teachers* (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Education Association, 1950), 6. Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park. Also see transcript of oral history with Guy Jewell, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 15. Because the state did not mandate kindergarten, no state dollars went to support the kindergartens, which were entirely funded by local county dollars.

<sup>37</sup> Greaney, ed. *Vistas*, 54-55.

<sup>38</sup> *Of the Children*, (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Board of Education, 1941), 7. Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park.

with societal changes.”<sup>39</sup> He encouraged innovation and experimentation. Mabel Smith, the principal at Parkside Elementary, employed experimental pedagogy beginning in the late 1930s. She had different instructors for different subjects teaching students in different corners of a classroom, a precursor to the “open space” innovations of the 1960s. Smith’s school eschewed letter grades and allowed students a degree of freedom and control over the school day. Children were encouraged to focus on subjects that were of particular interest to them. Broome believed that a rigid educational program imposed by a centralized bureaucracy would constrain the abilities of principals like Smith to innovate, and he encouraged his principals and teachers to use their own individual strengths and abilities in developing curricula. He supported teachers who sought to include students in the planning of lessons, reasoning that such inclusion would prompt students to take a more active role in their own education; the teacher’s role was one of a guide, as opposed to a taskmaster.<sup>40</sup> Not every teacher was necessarily as progressive as Broome would have liked, but he created a culture where teachers and principals could feel free to develop an educational program tailored to the specific students in their classrooms.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>*Of the Children*, (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Board of Education, 1941), 10. Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park.

<sup>40</sup> In 1954, a Board of Education publication called *These Are Your Schools* explained to residents of the county the “Laboratory Method” of education, which emphasized problem-solving and analytical skills, as opposed to “parroting” of information. A key component of this Laboratory Method was to include students in the decision-making process, allowing them to feel included in the planning of their studies. *These Are Your Schools* (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Board of Education, 1954), 17-19. Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park. Also see *Of the Children*, (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Board of Education, 1941), 8-9. Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park.

<sup>41</sup> Irene Sandifer, who later served on the county Board of Education, sent her daughter to the Parkside school in the early 1940s, and fondly recalled Smith and Broome in an oral history interview

In addition to the emphasis on the link between education and the maintenance of a democratic society, Dewey's emphasis on pragmatism and flexibility affected Broome's approach to administration.<sup>42</sup> State Superintendent Pullen and others noted that Broome was both visionary and practical, a difficult tension that Broome seemed to nurture with ease. In terms of curricular advances, Broome established summer seminars for teachers in the mid-1930s, and he encouraged teachers to continue their own education, while simultaneously warning against becoming rigid or inflexible in their application of academic knowledge in their classrooms, preferring that teachers see their vocation as an ever-evolving process of intellectual exchange with students.<sup>43</sup> He sought out ways for teachers to work with each other and liked to share success stories so that good ideas could be spread throughout the county.<sup>44</sup> Broome tended to speak using analogies, often making his points elliptically and allowing his listeners to feel as though they had

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recorded in the 1970s. Transcript of Oral History with Irene Sandifer, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 5, 4.

<sup>42</sup> In the 1949 MCPS Administrative Handbook, Broome articulates his somewhat contradictory philosophy, noting that "the central core of any service should control it, providing a unity of effort that insures at the same time a sense of freedom and maximum helpfulness." Control and freedom, occurring simultaneously, seems to be how Broome envisioned his administrative goal. *Administrational Handbook: Guide to the Administration of Schools in Montgomery County, Maryland* (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Board of Education, 1949), 1. Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park.

<sup>43</sup> *Of the Children*, (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Board of Education, 1941), 11. Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park.

<sup>44</sup> One way Broome did this was to tell Teacher A that he really liked what Teacher B was doing. This approach gave Teacher B some credit for their innovation, while also serving as a very mild reminder that Teacher A could be improving. Transcript of Oral History with Guy Jewell, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 21. Also see Greaney, ed. *Vistas*, 49.

arrived at conclusions themselves.<sup>45</sup> This gentle hand inspired widespread devotion to Broome among teachers and parents in the community.<sup>46</sup>

In many respects, Broome *was* the school system, the physical embodiment of the schools that people wished to have. When citizens petitioned or otherwise wanted to talk with someone about a schools issue, they went directly to Broome with their issues.<sup>47</sup> Broome sorted the mail sent to the Board of Education himself and personally visited all of the schools in the county several times a year.<sup>48</sup> In addition, Broome held office hours where members of the public could meet with him directly and also made himself available during nights and weekends.<sup>49</sup> Because of this close level of interaction with the Superintendent, members of the public did not often attend School Board meetings, and there were few public hearings on educational matters. Everything was done one-on-one. Since all hiring and transferring of teachers was handled by Broome, and because he was generous in allowing teachers to move to locations of their choosing, most teachers felt intense loyalty to the

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<sup>45</sup> Transcript of Oral History with Guy Jewell, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 11. Jewell notes that one county resident had once told him, about a meeting with Broome, “I sat there and talked with him for a half hour and all the time I thought he was saying yes, and when I got outside and thought it over, he said no all the time.” Other stories are recounted in *Vistas*, such as one where he brought three principals together to help a new principal. After a discussion the group comes up with a sound solution. “He didn’t *tell* us to do a damn thing!” one of the principals later recalled. Greaney, ed. *Vistas* 48-49.

<sup>46</sup> Testimonials to Broome upon his retirement bordered on the reverential. Greaney, ed. *Vistas*, 48-56.

<sup>47</sup> One county resident spoke to Broome about some repairs that were necessary at the local school; the repairs were already scheduled to be done, but Broome didn’t mention that and allowed the resident to be satisfied that their call had prompted action when the fix was handled speedily. Transcript of Oral History with Guy Jewell, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 21.

<sup>48</sup> Greaney, ed. *Vistas*, 49.

<sup>49</sup> Transcript of Oral History with Guy Jewell, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 19.

Superintendent.<sup>50</sup> People throughout the county felt connected to the school system because they felt a direct connection with Edwin Broome; they trusted that their schools were good because they trusted their Superintendent.

The educational program that Broome developed was attractive to many of people who moved to the county during the interwar decades.<sup>51</sup> His belief in the link between a progressive educational program and a thriving democratic society was demonstrative of an attitude that also motivated the professionals who came to work for government agencies and affiliated institutions in and around Washington. Every individual needed the skills to solve problems, test theories, and arrive at reasonable conclusions. This held true for citizens participating in their government as well as for professionals working in the private and public sectors. Maintaining a public school system that could cultivate these attitudes and abilities in children was important to these new arrivals to the county, and the system Broome had created was pointed in the right direction. Yet for some of these new arrivals, there were two major problems with Broome's school system.

First, there was an uncomfortable tension between the educational program and the actual level of public input in the administration of the schools. Because School Board members were appointed by the governor and not elected by the people of the county, Broome's close relationship with Brooke Lee and Lee's considerable

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<sup>50</sup> Broome's hands-on hiring practices are detailed in Greaney, ed. *Vistas*, 48, when a teacher recalls how her job interview was conducted outside on a park bench. She was given the job on the spot and Broome personally drove her to Damascus. Jewell mentions the relocation possibilities which he himself took advantage of, opting to move down-county later in his career, with Broome's blessing. Transcript of Oral History with Guy Jewell, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 36.

<sup>51</sup> In addition to Leslie Abbe, who made this point directly in an oral history interview, the sentiment that the excellent schools helped to attract new residents to the county during the 1930s and 1940s is reflected in Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space*, 275-276. Also see Heibert and MacMaster, *A Grateful Remembrance*, 278-281.

power in Annapolis meant that in practice Broome had control over those appointments. As long as the county's schools adhered to state bylaws, Broome wielded largely unchecked power over the system. For all intents and purposes, "local control" of the school system meant trusting Broome to make the right decisions.<sup>52</sup> This situation seemed at odds with an educational program emphasizing the important role that each individual citizen played in a democratic republic. Moreover, School Board meetings were sparsely attended because there was no real tradition of public activism in educational matters, and this meant that the public had very few opportunities to express their opinions to school officials. The people liked the system Broome had built, but some of the new arrivals wanted more public oversight and input.

Second, shockingly few policies and procedures governed the way that Montgomery County Public Schools were actually administered. Broome ran things in a hands-on fashion that in many ways mirrored the political machine overseen by Brooke Lee. The Superintendent personally handled all decisions about hiring and transferring teachers, adoption of new textbooks or pedagogical techniques, and construction of school buildings. Considerable ambiguity existed regarding lines of authority and responsibility within the system's administrative hierarchy.<sup>53</sup> For

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<sup>52</sup> Upon his retirement, many citizens commended Broome's sense of "timing," his ability to sense when particular innovations were needed and when to request more money for a new initiative. On the other side of that coin, he also somehow knew when not to push in a new direction. An excerpt from Florence Massey Black's testimonial is included in Greaney, ed. *Vistas*, 51-52. Also, Irene Sandifer, who served on the Board of Education in the late 1940s, also agreed with Black that Broome was very realistic and reasonable about what he would push for in terms of appropriations, never asking for more than he thought he could get at any given time. Transcript of oral history with Irene Sandifer, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 4, 14.

<sup>53</sup> In 1949, Broome finally realized that "a comprehensive statement of these practices and procedures becomes increasingly necessary with the growing magnitude and complexity of the

example, the duties and responsibilities of the Vice Principals within individual schools were not clearly defined in any written policy. Initiatives to fix problems often stalled while people sought to determine who had the authority to take action. Principals, supervisors, and special services personnel met with the Superintendent one-on-one, whenever a question occurred to them, to resolve problems.<sup>54</sup> This seemed like an inefficient way to run a growing school system, and it seemed possible that favoritism or retribution could be displayed through uneven application of rules and allocation of resources.<sup>55</sup>

Although Broome did not abuse his power as far as anyone could tell, the absence of codified administrative policies and procedures created opportunities for waste or, perhaps, graft to occur. According to Guy Jewell, a career administrator hired by Broome in 1921, when it came time to develop the school system budget the Superintendent “would just sit in his office, do some thinking and some math, and then entered a few figures on a scrap of paper and then he would go to the courthouse

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County’s educational program” and oversaw the publication of an *Administrational Handbook*. This did clarify and, for the first time, codify in writing, the rules which governed the system, but until Broome’s retirement in 1953 things continued to operate according to his preferred informality. *Administrational Handbook: Guide to the Administration of Schools in Montgomery County, Maryland* (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Board of Education, 1949), i. Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park.

<sup>54</sup> In 1955 the Board of Education paid McKinsey & Company to do an extensive external review of the school system; their findings and recommendations were transmitted a lengthy report titled “A Program for Improving the Montgomery County Public School System” in February of 1956. Within the county, this document became known as the “McKinsey Report;” it is discussed in detail in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. MCA, BOE Printed Materials, McKinsey Report, 1955, p. 2-10 – 2-12.

<sup>55</sup> Broome’s informal methods were also applied to the Board of Education. In 1955, when McKinsey and Company studied the county’s school system, the ensuing report went out of its way to specify that Board decision-making procedures needed to be standardized, and went so far as to outline a fairly straightforward step-by-step process that should be followed (state the problem, gather relevant evidence objectively, consider possible courses of action, make a decision, take action). It seems clear that the McKinsey researchers were somewhat astonished by the *lack* of such a simple and standard policy, which is illustrative of how Broome had run things. MCA, BOE Printed Materials, McKinsey Report, 1955, p. 2-20.



and talk with the treasurer, and say, ‘Well, I’m going to need this much money to run the schools this year.’”<sup>56</sup> Such casualness with budgeting astonished Leslie Abbe, who arrived in the county in 1941 to work at the Congressional Budget Office. Abbe’s support for Broome’s progressive educational program and his sympathetic feelings for Broome as an individual did not alleviate his strong misgivings when the Superintendent showed him the county’s school budget, consisting of five general categories listed in terms of priority without monetary totals attached.<sup>57</sup> Abbe was used to doing things by the book, and as far as he could tell, there was no book that Broome or any future Superintendent was compelled to follow.

The absence of clear guidelines for the creation of budgets made it near impossible for the County Council to track Board spending.<sup>58</sup> The Council, and not the Board, had the authority to tax and to allocate revenue, and every year the Board had to submit a budget to the Council for approval. Although the budget request officially came from the School Board, the Board simply passed along Broome’s preferences. Every year, the Board proposed both an operating budget, covering the costs of running the system that year, as well as a capital budget, covering large-scale and long-term infrastructure improvements. During the 1940s and early 1950s, the Board occasionally proposed a particular project in the capital budget but failed to initiate the proposed construction or renovation. The Board instead spent the money intended for this project elsewhere, and the following year proposed the same project

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<sup>56</sup> Transcript of Oral History with Guy Jewell, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 19-20.

<sup>57</sup> Transcript of oral history with Leslie Abbe, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 1, 2.

<sup>58</sup> The County Council replaced the Board of Commissioners when the Charter was adopted, as will be discussed shortly.

a second time. Thus, the County Council allocated dollars several times over for the same project, while the Board redirected the money wherever Broome wished. This sort of activity could very easily result in money being skimmed, and even if everything was being spent on an actual educational expenditure, it certainly was not the sort bookkeeping procedure the new professional residents of the county were likely to accept.<sup>59</sup>

A paradox slowly formed in the minds of some residents in Montgomery County: the schools were excellent, but the way they were run was not. The only way to maintain the excellence would be to dramatically reform the way they were run. The two key reforms were to increase democratic participation in the management of school affairs by establishing a locally-elected School Board, and reorganize school system policies and procedures with an emphasis on merit-based hiring and objective and professional managerial principles. Liberal reformers like Leslie Abbe were confident that these substantial changes could be undertaken without altering the educational program, or the public perception of that program, in a significant way. They were also confident that increased democratic participation and increased bureaucratization were goals that did not conflict with one another, reflecting a misguided assumption that the voting public would always support the liberals' own educational vision.

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<sup>59</sup> This particular fiscal sleight of hand was finally uncovered as part of the McKinsey study that occurred in 1955; the description of the practice in the McKinsey Report strongly suggests that the practice had occurred for years. See MCA, BOE Printed Materials, McKinsey Report, 1955, p. 3-5 to 3-19. The Montgomery County Civic Federation, in its response to the McKinsey Report, was shocked by the allegation, and notes that the facts presented are either in "error or indicates an utterly inexcusable lack of financial responsibility on the part of the Board of Education." The MCCF response also notes that since 1953 budgeting had been more systematically done; Broome retired that spring. See MCCF Schools Committee Report on the McKinsey Report, March, 1956. MCA, RG 18, MCCF, Series III, Box 2, Folder: Schools, 1955-1980, 2.

Montgomery County actually maintained two separate public school systems in the 1940s as required by state law, one for whites and one for blacks. The black school system and desegregation will be discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation; desegregation occurred in the late 1950s amid the ongoing white liberal reform efforts emphasizing dispassionate professional managerial policies. Establishing the elected School Board and initiating the administrative overhaul technically addressed the black school system because both systems were under the control of the Montgomery County Public Schools. However, prior to 1954 the white liberal reformers were not particularly concerned with the education of black children.<sup>60</sup> Although the Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations, the primary liberal activist group, embraced desegregation just weeks after the *Brown* decision was announced, prior to that point these white liberal activists had not worked with their black counterparts in the Federation of Parent-Teacher Associations who were struggling to maintain the black schools.<sup>61</sup>

Leslie Abbe and other white liberal educational reformers began working towards their goals during the mid-1940s, a time of considerable political upheaval in Montgomery County. Two decades earlier, several civic associations and community leagues from various parts of the county had joined together to form the Montgomery

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<sup>60</sup> There was an organization called the Negro Schools Committee that existed in the early 1950s, just before *Brown*, that was dedicated to improving and modernizing the school facilities for black children; Leslie Abbe was a member of that committee. The School Board did commit to new buildings to house the black junior and senior high schools, possibly due to lobbying by this committee.

<sup>61</sup> This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two. The black Federation of P-TAs had worked for decades to try and improve the black schools in the county; the School Board was largely indifferent to their efforts. According to Nina Clarke, during the first years of the elected Board in the early 1950s not much changed in terms of attention paid to the black schools. The reforms of the late 1940s, in other words, did not have a significant impact on the black school system or the black residents in the county. Nina Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County, Maryland, 1872-1961* (New York: Vantage Press, 1978).

County Civic Federation, and members of this Federation teamed with a vibrant local chapter of the League of Women Voters to organize opposition to Brooke Lee's Democratic Party machine.<sup>62</sup> These two organizations took the first step in establishing the new power of grassroots activism in Montgomery. In 1938 members of these two organizations petitioned the Board of County Commissioners to contract with the Brookings Institution to do a formal study of the county's government.<sup>63</sup> The resulting 740 page book-length report amounted to "one of the most comprehensive studies of county government ever made anywhere" in the United States at the time.<sup>64</sup> The report was divided into sections that carefully analyzed every aspect of Montgomery County's government and public services, including education, public health, water and sewage, law enforcement, planning and zoning, public utilities, and so on.

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<sup>62</sup> The Montgomery County Archives, housed at the Montgomery County Historical Society, has extensive holdings of the MCCF from this time period. Space does not permit a lengthy examination of the MCCF, but it is important to note their liberal attitudes about politics and government. Members of the MCCF fashioned an organization that valued careful and reasoned judgments supported by hard evidence. Its various committees initiated studies and created reports that were thick with charts, graphs, and numerical data, and the resolutions voted on by the Federation strived to be sensible and dispassionate. The Montgomery County Civic Federation, in other words, operated in a way that its own members believed that government institutions ought to function. The Federation was formed in 1925 and primarily consisted of member organizations situated in the suburban down-county area; the growth of the Federation in size and power was proportional to the influx of professionals into this area during the subsequent decades. See, for example, of Bylaws of the Montgomery County Civic Federation, MCA, RG 18, MCCF. Also see attachment to letter from R. Barker to H. Morris, July 11, 1944, which outlines some of the standing and ad hoc committees. Harold Morris Papers, MCA, RG 17, Series I, Box I, Folder: MCCF. Alice Hostetler, who was very active in the League of Women Voters in its cooperation with the MCCF to reform the county's government, wrote a MA thesis on the ways in which the MCCF educated the public about issues, see Oral History of Alice Hostetler, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 2, 21.

<sup>63</sup> *Our County Government* pamphlet discusses how the study was undertaken. Harold Morris Papers, MCA, RG 17, Series I, Box I, Folder: MCCF. Also see Brookings Report, letter of transmittal, v.

<sup>64</sup> *Our County Government* pamphlet, 2. Harold Morris Papers, MCA, RG 17, Series I, Box I, Folder: MCCF. Brookings wound up contributing about \$25,000 of its own money to aid in the completion of the study.

A mountain of evidence was marshaled to argue that Montgomery County had outgrown its present form of government should reorganize around the principle of home rule.<sup>65</sup> According to the amendment to the state constitution that Brooke Lee's father Blair Lee had helped to establish, any county in Maryland could choose to create an independent county government by following a series of steps.<sup>66</sup> If twenty per cent of the registered voters signed a petition requesting a referendum on home rule, the question would be put on the local ballot at the next election. At this election, voters would choose whether or not to establish a Charter Board; if established, this Board would draft a Charter which would then be voted on two years later, at the next regularly scheduled election. If the voters approved the written Charter which outlined the parameters for the new county government, the legislature in Annapolis was obligated to grant their request to establish home rule.<sup>67</sup> It was a deliberately thorough process, designed to afford ample time for consideration, but it provided a clear path towards county independence.

Between 1942 and 1948 reformers struggled to establish a Charter form of government in Montgomery County, with Brooke Lee bringing to bear all of his

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<sup>65</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that, although the Brookings Report is a model of careful and unbiased presentation of evidence, from the start it was very likely that the Brookings investigators would find the county's governmental structure lacking. The key issue was growth. While it could be argued that a sparsely populated sleepy rural hamlet could be efficiently governed with little institutional structure, as the growth and development that Brooke Lee had encouraged began to gain momentum it became harder to justify a lack of formalized procedures to govern the increasingly populated county.

<sup>66</sup> Dorothy Himstead recalled later that the thrust of the Brookings recommendation was to "take advantage of the Home Rule amendment." Transcript of Oral History of Dorothy Himstead, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 2, 4-5.

<sup>67</sup> Article XI-A, Section I of the Maryland State Constitution.

influence to block their efforts.<sup>68</sup> Supporters of the Charter promoted the ideas of direct democracy, increased governmental efficiency, and professional management at a series of town hall meetings, letters to the editor of local papers, and through leafleting and mailings to county residents.<sup>69</sup> They made these arguments in the hopes that an educated and reasonably thoughtful citizenry would grasp their superiority to the status quo of rule by Lee's Democratic Party machine, although it seems important to note that the status quo had produced the prosperous and thriving community that the reformers now sought to modify.<sup>70</sup> The appeal of increased democratic participation and systemization of governmental procedures had to be emphasized by the reformers because Lee's machine had managed county affairs smoothly and few people felt strong antipathy toward him before the Charter push was initiated.<sup>71</sup> This was a tension which would soon also be confronted by the

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<sup>68</sup> The story of the Charter fight is convoluted and colorful, and although space does not permit it to be told here, interested researchers can find a wealth of materials at the Montgomery County Archives. Until 2010, these archives were open to the public. At present, they are not accessible.

<sup>69</sup> The Committee printed copies of the Charter and distributed them throughout the county; under the banner headline "The Charter" read the words "Efficiency. Home Rule. Economy. An issue for you to decide." This strategy – of distributing the entire text of the charter directly to the citizenry, while emphasizing in bold type that the decision rested in their hands, was reflective both of what Charterites wanted to achieve, and of how confident they were that their arguments were superior. See Harold Morris Papers, MCA, RG 17, Series II, Box 2, Folder: Montgomery County Charter Committee. Also see LOWV pamphlet titled "Charter Information: Questions and Answers." See MCA, RG 18, MCCC, Box 1, Folder: June-September, 1942.

<sup>70</sup> Years later Allen Gardner noted with pride that the pro-Charter factions did not resort to deceit, trickery, or fabrications, and instead relied upon straightforward and rational appeals to make their case in 1944. Speech by Allen Gardner, MCA, RG 18, Montgomery County Charter Committee, Box 1, Folder: Feb. 1952-May 1976, 7.

<sup>71</sup> In an oral history interview taken in 1973 one of the leaders of the Charter push, Allen Gardner, admitted that he actually received some benefits from the Lee machine. When the streets in his neighborhood were paved his own driveway was paved as well, free of charge. Gardner acknowledged that he did not feel particularly "pinched" by the system, and he also acknowledged that even though folks knew Lee was the boss there was not really a perception that Lee was lining his pockets with public dollars. Nevertheless, Gardner felt that the government of the county needed to be

educational reformers: to convince a community that was largely satisfied with the workings of its government, and its school system, that the best way to ensure the long-term success of their public institutions was to dramatically modify the way that its leaders were installed and its policies were carried out.

Lee's forceful opposition to the Charter and his use of scare tactics and innuendo about the Charterites likely soured many in the public on Lee's own leadership and led to the eventual adoption of the Charter.<sup>72</sup> He succeeded in delaying but not preventing the transition to a new form of government, and in the fall of 1948 county residents voted to elect the first County Council. Council members immediately created a Personnel Board and a Merit Board to evaluate county employees and establish procedures for new hires. The Council also developed a countywide Road Code that established standards for paving the streets, and in general "repealed outdated laws and put new ones in their place to carry out the spirit of the Charter."<sup>73</sup>

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examined to see if things could be improved. Transcript of oral history interview with Allen Gardner, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 2, 12-13.

<sup>72</sup> For example, Lee's literature argued that most Charter supporters were new to the county and therefore not "real" Montgomery County residents; he also argued that they were "do-gooders" who wanted to experiment on the county's government and treat citizens like "guinea pigs." Finally, putting the matter most plainly, Lee's pamphlets proclaimed that "CHARTER WILL RAISE YOUR TAXES and Lower the Value of YOUR VOTE," an attempt to directly challenge the benefits of "home rule." See a pamphlet titled "Questions Vital to Every Montgomery County Voter" in 1942. See MCA, RG 18, MCCC, Box 1, Folder: June-September, 1942. Also see anti-Charter flyer, MCA, RG 18, MCCC, Box 1, Folder: 1944.

<sup>73</sup> Transcript of Oral History interview with Dorothy Himsted, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 2, 11. Also, Lathrop Smith, who would later serve on both the County Council and School Board in the 1950s, later recalled that the first two years (1949-50) were ones of tremendous accomplishment by the new Council. Referring to Frederic Lee and Himsted, Smith noted that "They literally picked this county up and set it down headed in another direction." Transcript of Oral History interview with Lathrop Smith, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 4, 19.

Debates and discussion about the merits of the Charter dominated the local political scene during the 1940s, and two arguments in particular resonated with citizens who were concerned about the county's school system. First, the arguments for home rule applied with equal force to the School Board. Educational reformers seized on the successful rhetoric used by the Charterites and sought to remove control of School Board appointments from the Lee machine and have them decided in county elections instead. Second, the Charterites also pushed for merit-based hiring and increased professionalism in the operation of county government. During the Lee years, it was common practice for county officials to make purchases from vendors who were loyal to the Party, as opposed to opening up a competitive bidding process.<sup>74</sup> Charter supporters argued that this both wasted money and potentially resulted in inferior services, since the guiding principle was not efficiency but rather the distribution of dollars to designated contractors and retailers. This directly affected the school system through the position of Supervisor of School Property, given to a party loyalist who handled hires and purchases according to Lee's preferences.<sup>75</sup> In the 1940s the position of Supervisor changed hands several times,

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<sup>74</sup> Transcript of Oral History interview with Allen Gardner, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 2, 12.

<sup>75</sup> Guy Jewell later recalled that everyone knew that the Supervisor of School Property was a "political deal;" the MCCPTA picked this fight deliberately because it was one of the most obvious examples of crony-based, as opposed to merit-based, hiring. The Supervisor was a significant position, overseeing a staff of around 300 carpenters, plumbers, custodians, bus drivers, and other maintenance staff. By controlling the Supervisor, in effect Lee controlled the hiring of all of these employees and used these hires to his political advantage. Transcript of Oral History interview with Guy Jewell, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 25-27. The handbook for teachers, published by the MCEA in 1950, discusses the 310 people employed by the county for maintenance and custodial work. *Handbook for Teachers* (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Education Association, 1950), 7. Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park.



creating an instability that hampered efforts at long-term county-wide planning.<sup>76</sup> By the late 1940s there were complaints that many of the school buildings were suffering from disrepair.<sup>77</sup>

The Charterites promised to employ merit-based hiring and professional principles grounded in efficiency when they created the new county government, and the liberal educational activists focused on the position of Supervisor of School Property as their first attempt to apply the pro-Charter arguments to the issue of school reform. In 1944, Mrs. Thomas Pyle, whose husband was principal at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School, teamed with Leslie Abbe, parent of four children in the public schools, to create the Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations.<sup>78</sup> Like the Civic Federation, the MCCPTA was formed to unite the various Parent-Teacher Associations of particular schools to form a single organization. Instead of advocating for their individual schools, members of the new organization could coordinate their resources – financial, intellectual, man-hours, etc – to influence school officials at the county level. Also like the Civic Federation, many of the members of the MCCPTA were recent arrivals to the county, liberal

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<sup>76</sup> Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 66. Clarke notes that there were “three Supervisors of School Property in as many years” during the mid-40s, which the black community found particularly frustrating since the black schools were in dreadful shape and needed a comprehensive consolidation and building plan to be developed.

<sup>77</sup> Esther Bloomer later recalled being shocked when she went to attend her first meeting of the Chevy Chase Elementary PTA and found school’s only multipurpose room to be a dingy basement. She also notes that the Supervisor of School Property got paid but “did nothing” and the schools were “perfectly frightful.” Transcript of oral history interview with Esther Bloomer, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 1, 2, also 11. Irene Sandifer, who was one of the last people to be appointed to the Board of Education, in 1946, later recalled that the major task of the Board in the late 40s was to address the “appalling” degradation of the school buildings. Transcript of oral history interview with Irene Sandifer, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 4, 19.

<sup>78</sup> Transcript of oral history interview with Leslie Abbe, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 1, 5.

professionals who believed that sound managerial procedures administered by credentialed experts produced superior public institutions.

The creation of a countywide MCCPTA in 1944 marked a significant transition for the parent-teacher associations in the county. During most of Edwin Broome's tenure, the P-TAs from individual schools donated time, labor, and energy to improving those schools. Mothers volunteered to staff the cafeteria and perform small-scale nursing activities for cuts and bruises. In keeping with the loose administrative apparatus that Broome oversaw, the P-TAs of particular schools had substantial autonomy to operate according to their own preferences. But the MCCPTA was something different, a countywide organization focused on grassroots activism, more similar to the League of Women Voters or the Civic Federation than to a traditional P-TA of a single school.<sup>79</sup> In the MCCPTA, women played a significant role as both leaders and on-the-ground organizers, likely because they saw education as a particularly important area for community concern. These women were better educated than the typical suburban housewife, and they shared with their husbands a faith in scientific managerial principles for administering public institutions.<sup>80</sup> Leslie Abbe's wife Opal joined her husband as an active member of the MCCPTA during the 1940s and 1950s.

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<sup>79</sup> By 1950, over 14,700 parents and teachers were members of various Parent-Teacher Associations. Although, as a coalition of the various P-TAs, the MCCPTA did not always reflect the viewpoints and ideas of all of the members of all of the local P-TAs, the MCCPTA nevertheless had a large and dedicated network of individuals from which to solicit opinions or request volunteer efforts. *Handbook for Teachers* (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Education Association, 1950), 18. Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park.

<sup>80</sup> In 1964, two scholars, Keith Goldhammer and Frank Farner, published *The Jackson County Story*, a case study examination of a particularly contentious School Board election in a suburban county in 1962. That election is discussed in Chapter Three of this dissertation, and "Jackson County" is a pseudonym for Montgomery County, Maryland. Goldhammer and Farner quote one observer as

Also, although the “T” in MCCPTA stood for teachers, in practice this organization was dominated by parents like the Abbes. As will be discussed in Chapters Three and Four teachers in the county did not become politically active in a significant way until the 1960s. The mothers and fathers who joined the P-TA of their child’s school elected a representative who attended meetings of the countywide Council of P-TAs; the MCCPTA’s own officers and executive committee were drawn from among these representatives. Leslie Abbe served as President of the MCCPTA in 1946 and 1947, and he increased the MCCPTA from eight member schools to thirty-three member schools during his tenure; he also set up procedures designed to draw the P-TAs of new schools as they opened. The MCCPTA very quickly became a powerful organization because its organizational structure allowed for decisions made by the leadership to be distributed to the rank-and-file membership very quickly. By the same token, concerns expressed by individual parents could be relayed to the leadership at MCCPTA meetings, and this allowed local-level concerns to be addressed while maintaining a large-scale perspective of overall educational excellence.

The creation of the MCCPTA marked a significant turning point in the history of educational politics in Montgomery County. This was the first group of people to

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alleging that Montgomery County politics during the 1940s and 1950s was something of a “gynecocracy.” Part of this was due to the Hatch Act, which forbade federal employees from involvement in local politics; in practice, this meant that some women stood in for their husbands when local political activism occurred. But if that was the case in some instances, women were well-represented in the leadership ranks of many of the organizations which worked to implement the reforms to county government and the school system. This study also notes the relatively high levels of educational attainment by women in Montgomery County. Keith Goldhammer and Frank Farner, *The Jackson County Story* (Eugene, OR: University of Oregon Press, 1964), 8-9. Local activist Norman Christeller noted that local women activists, like those in the League of Women Voters and others, were in some cases proxies for their husbands whom, due to the Hatch Act, could not be directly involved themselves. Transcript of Oral History interview with Norman Christeller, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 1, 26-27.

self-identify and employ various strategies to try and initiate educational reforms at the county level. Importantly, the activists in the MCCPTA came together and agreed upon a very specific understanding of educational excellence. They wanted to continue Edwin Broome's emphasis on progressive education and the cultivation of responsible and active citizens, but their educational vision had two other specific components. First was their faith in democracy and home rule. Members of the MCCPTA believed that their own opinions on educational administration would produce a superior school system, and they wanted to develop policies and mechanisms to ensure these opinions were heard. Second, their confidence in democratic mechanisms coexisted, perhaps uneasily, with trust in efficient scientific managerial principles. Members of the MCCPTA were convinced that their school system bureaucracy should run according to objective policies administered by dispassionate professionals. The tension between a school system responsive to public demands and a school system run with dispassionate efficiency was resolved in the minds of liberal activists by their certainty that their own opinions about educational excellence would always be shared by the public at large.

The Charter fight had demonstrated to members of the MCCPTA the impact that a dedicated and committed activist group could have on county politics, and Leslie Abbe set his sights on the Supervisor of School Property position as the first focal point for the new parent-teacher group. The Supervisor of School Property was particularly important because of the coming baby boom. Montgomery County had been rapidly expanding for two decades, but following World War II the population began to grow at an unprecedented rate. From 1947 to 1953, school enrollment

increased by over four thousand students annually, more than doubling the total enrollment from 18,546 to 42,605.<sup>81</sup> The enrollment rate was projected to increase in coming years, and this kind of rapid expansion called for careful planning to ensure that dollars were spent efficiently and that school system growth mirrored the geographic trajectory of population expansion. Allowing the important job of Supervisor of School Property to be filled by one of Brooke Lee's party hacks was unacceptable to members of the MCCPTA, especially with such significant growth on the horizon.

On a more practical level, Abbe saw the Supervisor of School Property position as a way to demonstrate to his membership that the MCCPTA could work effectively on behalf of all of the county's students and parents. Some parents had grumbled about paying additional dues to the MCCPTA in addition to their own school's PTA, and Abbe wanted to show these skeptics that countywide educational activism was worth supporting. Because everyone in the county knew that the appointment of the Supervisor was a "political deal," Abbe realized that it would make a good example to everyone in the community if his organization could change the way the position was filled.<sup>82</sup> Abbe began to deploy some traditional tactics of grassroots organizing, including building alliances and generating public support. He sought out potential allies and discovered that the State Superintendent of Education, Thomas Pullen, was concerned about corruption in the counties. Other sympathetic

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<sup>81</sup> *These Are Your Schools* (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Board of Education, 1954), 6. Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park.

<sup>82</sup> Guy Jewell, in his oral history, casually remembered how the political nature of the appointment was commonly known in the county. Transcript of Oral History interview with Guy Jewell, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 25-27.

parties included the Civic Federation and League of Women Voters, who had joined forces to push for the Brookings Institution study that precipitated the Charter movement.

Joining with those organizations, the MCCPTA staged a large and well-publicized public meeting to discuss the Supervisor for School Property position in the spring of 1946. The agenda of the meeting was deliberately open-ended; Abbe wanted concerned citizens to testify about problems like crumbling infrastructure and inadequate planning and then to allow the discussion to turn to potential solutions. Abbe later recalled that he and other MCCPTA leaders mostly asked questions like “What’s the best way to approach this situation? What can we do about this?” in order to help draw the people in attendance into the process of crafting a solution.<sup>83</sup> Calling and running this public forum on the Supervisor issue was another example of the changing educational politics in the county. There had not previously been very many public hearings on school matters, and School Board meetings did not often attract many interested observers. Abbe and the MCCPTA were determined to change that situation; in addition to their public hearing on the Supervisor of School Property, Abbe also gathered a group of MCCPTA members to attend a budget hearing that same spring, surprising Brooke Lee and his political allies who were unaccustomed to any public interference.<sup>84</sup>

Abbe followed these very public demonstrations of community concern by meeting with State Superintendent Pullen, who suggested that the MCCPTA come up with an excellent candidate to fill the post of Supervisor for School Property. The

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<sup>83</sup> Transcript of Oral History interview with Leslie Abbe, MCA, RG 16, Series III, Box 1, 10.

<sup>84</sup> Transcript of Oral History interview with Leslie Abbe, MCA, RG 16, Series III, Box 1, 7-8.

ideal candidate would be a credentialed expert with extensive planning experience, the embodiment of the type of person that an open and fair merit-based hiring procedure would favor. At Pullen's direction, Abbe worked with Edwin Broome to identify Richard Carpenter as their choice to fill the position. Carpenter, who was working in West Virginia, held a degree in engineering from Dartmouth and was about to take a position at Columbia University as its Building Manager. He had no connections to the Lee machine and, after taking the job in Montgomery County in the fall of 1946, oversaw the county's extensive building projects by creating a five-year plan that cost more than twenty-five million dollars. He was a friendly and good-natured man who met with representatives from individual communities to discuss facilities while also overseeing construction from the countywide perspective, and he served as a clear example of the kind of person that MCCPTA wanted to see filling all positions within the MCPS hierarchy.

Although Carpenter was the type of person Abbe believed merit-based hiring policies would install in top positions, the official hire was made by State Superintendent Pullen at the recommendation of the MCCPTA and Broome. Abbe was sure that his hiring criteria was superior to whatever criteria Lee had used to fill the position, but the appointment of Carpenter was not codified in the establishment of new hiring procedures for school officials. Still, the appointment was a major victory for the MCCPTA because it was a highly visible demonstration of the association's potential power. In just a few months the MCCPTA had developed partnerships, gathered public support, and brought its influence to bear on an appointment that oversaw a staff of 300 and was entrusted with planning the future

development of a rapidly-growing school system. The liberal parents who helmed the MCCPTA had demonstrated that their ideas about how to run the public schools should be put in to practice going forward.<sup>85</sup>

Elated and emboldened by their success, in 1947 Abbe and the MCCPTA turned their attention to the process that determined who served on the county's School Board.<sup>86</sup> Again adopting the strategy of the early home-rule advocates in the Civic Federation and League of Women Voters who had pushed for the Brookings Study, the MCCPTA formed a committee to do a survey of how School Board members were selected in other jurisdictions. The committee found that eighty-five percent of School Boards across the United States were elected, with most other Boards appointed by local authorities, like Mayors or City Councils.<sup>87</sup> Maryland was the only state where the governor made appointments to local School Boards, although within that system there were still opportunities for the local citizenry to make their preferences clear. As the case of Richard Carpenter had demonstrated, the MCCPTA could signal its opinion about a particular matter and get satisfaction by way of an appointment by the State Superintendent or governor. But in the late 1940s, just as the MCCPTA was beginning to discuss the desirability an elected

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<sup>85</sup> For a lengthy description of this initial MCCPTA push for a new Supervisor, see transcript of Oral History interview with Leslie Abbe, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 1, 11-12. Also see transcript of Oral History interview with Guy Jewell, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 49.

<sup>86</sup> *Washington Post*, "Montgomery County P-TA Council Recommends Elected School Board," February 26, 1948, 15.

<sup>87</sup> "A Study of the Method of Selection of School Board Members for Montgomery County," MCA, BOE Printed Materials, 4. The report contains more than a small suggestion that this situation was particularly unacceptable given that many in Montgomery County considered theirs to be an above-average, forward-thinking community. How could their method of school board selection be lagging so far behind the rest of the country?



School Board, the governor filled two local Board positions in a way that angered the liberal reformers.

First, in the summer of 1946, a Board member decided to resign before the end of his term and the governor replaced him with James Gill, a longtime Democratic Party loyalist with ties to Lee, before the vacancy had even been announced.<sup>88</sup> A few months later when another vacancy had to be filled, the MCCPTA submitted a list of its choices to the governor. The governor ignored the list and chose Irene Sandifer, in part because she had been active in the League of Women Voters and the Charter movement. Sandifer held a Master's degree from Columbia, and on paper she was exactly the kind of candidate whom the local education reformers should have supported: an experienced and credentialed authority in educational matters with no ties to the Lee machine. But as acceptable a candidate as Sandifer might have been, members of MCCPTA were still miffed that the governor had disregarded their list of suggested candidates.<sup>89</sup>

The following spring, the MCCPTA stepped up their efforts to establish an elected School Board. Extending the logic of "home rule" espoused by the Charterites, the MCCPTA argued that an elected Board would be more representative of and responsive to the desires of the citizenry, and that this would mean a superior governing apparatus. Not only did appointment by the governor create an

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<sup>88</sup> "A Study of the Method of Selection of School Board Members for Montgomery County," MCA, BOE Printed Materials, 1 Also Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space*, 317.

<sup>89</sup> It's uncertain who was on the list submitted by the MCCPTA, although once the elected School Board was established several members of the Association ran for seats on the Board themselves. It seems possible, then, that the MCCPTA suggested to the governor that members of their own Association be appointed to the Board, and perhaps the governor balked at this proposition. Transcript of Oral History interview with Irene Sandifer, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 4, 7-9; also see "A Study of the Method of Selection of School Board Members for Montgomery County," MCA, BOE Printed Materials, 1.

“undesirable separation of the school board and the community it serves,” it also invited corruption, as every member of the current Board was a member of Brooke Lee’s Democratic Party.<sup>90</sup> Charterites had argued that a locally-elected County Council would bring governmental operations closer to the people, resulting in a more responsive government that was more representative of what the citizenry actually wanted. The MCCPTA believed the same logic applied to School Boards: an elected Board would be better able to craft policies and procedures to ensure that Montgomery County’s schools were everything that the local citizenry wanted them to be.

The reformers found themselves caught in two distinct contradictions as they sought to make their case for an elected Board. First, although they tried very hard not to criticize the existing Board, all of their arguments were founded on the assumption that the current situation was unsatisfactory.<sup>91</sup> This was problematic because the school system enjoyed widespread support in the county. The educational program that Broome had worked for years to modernize was one of the things that had drawn people to the county, and by and large the membership of MCCPTA supported the curricular and pedagogical program in Montgomery County. Unlike Brooke Lee, whom the Charterites criticized directly for presiding over a corrupt county governmental apparatus, many of those who pushed for the elected

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<sup>90</sup> “A Study of the Method of Selection of School Board Members for Montgomery County,” MCA, BOE Printed Materials, 5-6 The report noted that some members of the Board continued to actively work for the Party even while serving on the Board, a particularly galling development.

<sup>91</sup> The MCCPTA report authors noted that they did not want their efforts to be construed as an “attack” on the present Board, some members of which, the report noted, had been doing an admirable job. The bulk of the report consisted of a point-by-point argument in favor of elected boards, with little to no mention of what might have been intolerable about the current situation. “A Study of the Method of Selection of School Board Members for Montgomery County,” MCA, BOE Printed Materials, 1, also 7-9.

School Board continually voiced their support and admiration for the longtime Superintendent. Many in the MCCPTA felt that Broome had done an exemplary job developing the system, and were very supportive of the progressive educational model that Broome had worked to implement.<sup>92</sup>

The reformers seem not to have noticed the dissonance of their convictions, at once greatly admiring their school system while simultaneously arguing that there was an urgent need to reform the way School Board members were selected. The MCCPTA repeatedly mentioned the claim that “educational authorities” overwhelmingly preferred elected Boards to appointed Boards.<sup>93</sup> The continued invocation of expert opinion allowed the MCCPTA to appeal to the highly educated Montgomery County citizenry using a language of professionalism that resonated, but it remained somewhat unclear why the leadership of MCPS needed to be fixed if nothing was broken. This hinted at a second contradiction confronting advocates of an elected Board. The MCCPTA greatly valued the opinion of professional educators and believed that credentialed professionals should be placed in charge of actually running the school system, employing their expertise in a dispassionate manner to ensure the best possible education for all students. Richard Carpenter was just such an expert, and the MCCPTA believed that objective merit-based hiring should govern the way that other administrative positions were filled. But by opening up the School

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<sup>92</sup> Transcript of Oral History interview with Leslie Abbe, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 1, 10. The testimonials at Broome’s retirement bordered on the reverential, see Greaney, ed., *Vistas*, 52-23. Esther Bloomer, who worked hard to get the League of Women Voters to support the elected School Board, was similarly supportive of Broome.

<sup>93</sup> “A Study of the Method of Selection of School Board Members for Montgomery County,” MCA, BOE Printed Materials, 4-6.

Board to popular election, it was possible that citizens with little to no professional expertise in matters of schooling could win seats on the Board.

Leslie Abbe and others liberals seemed to assume that their progressive educational attitudes were shared by voters in the county, and that those voters would reliably select candidates to serve on the Board who shared those attitudes. According to Abbe, the activists simply wanted “to choose our own people” when it came to running the system, and he was confident that most residents in Montgomery County agreed with the MCCPTA leadership on matters like the nature of the educational program, the desirability of increased investment in education, and organizational principles for the educational administration.<sup>94</sup> It did not trouble him at the time to consider that School Board elections could create a public arena for expression of different educational philosophies, or that candidates with undesirable (from the liberals’ perspective) philosophies might secure seats on the Board.

An early indication that this might indeed be the outcome of future Board elections was the emergence of a small faction of citizens in the late 1940s who did not like Edwin Broome or the progressive education he promoted.<sup>95</sup> Pointing to an increase in “subversive” activity in the federal government, Kensington resident Robert Parke questioned the idea that students should be taught according to a “developmental theory” that focused on teaching students the foundations of “group living.” Parke saw the progressive education program as an opportunity for devious communists and their fellow-travelers to indoctrinate students to be docile and accepting of collectivism, and he believed that the parents within the county needed

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<sup>94</sup> Transcript of Oral History interview with Leslie Abbe, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 1, 14.

<sup>95</sup> Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space*, 264.

more direct control over their school system to prevent this from happening.<sup>96</sup> Also, a group calling itself the Three R's Protest Group formed in 1948 to lobby the School Board to reform aspects of the schools curriculum.<sup>97</sup> They did not like the idea of having "social studies" instead of a traditional American history course and they rejected the experimentation that Broome allowed to occur within individual schools, preferring a standard and uniform curriculum across all of the county's schools. They also protested the use of certain textbooks, which they believed promoted socialism.<sup>98</sup>

Conservative educational activists like these found common cause with the liberal supporters of progressive education in the MCCPTA when it came to the issue of elected School Boards. Although they had very different ideas about what ought to be happening inside the classrooms, they agreed that the best way to see their preferred changes take effect would be to bring control of the educational apparatus closer to the citizens of the County. The conflicting views over curriculum and pedagogy which would come to characterize races for seats on the School Board in future decades were initially subdued while the reformers focused on their short-term goal of establishing an elected Board. Leslie Abbe and the other liberal reformers were so confident in the superiority of their own educational vision that they

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<sup>96</sup> *Washington Post*, Letters to the Editor, Robert Parke "Philosophy of Education," October 25, 1948, 10.

<sup>97</sup> The origins of the 3 R's Protest Group are discussed in Goldhammer and Farnier, *The Jackson County Story*, 29.

<sup>98</sup> Irene Sandifer, who served on the Board during the late 1940s, recalled the development of the 3 R's group in an oral history interview. Transcript of Oral History interview with Irene Sandifer, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 4, 27-33. Also, Guy Jewell noted that there were various groups, with ever-changing names, including the Three R's Group, the Committee for Better Education, and the Conservative Club. Usually they were aligned with taxpayer's groups, who wanted to keep costs down, but in the late 40s and early 50s they were also vocally concerned about curricular content and the threat of communism. Transcript of Oral History interview with Guy Jewell, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 41-42.

presumed the citizenry would reliably endorse it at the ballot box, ignoring the potential threat posed by the conservative activists who rejected progressive education and preferred traditional instruction in the Three R's.

Even as liberal activists gathered support for the elected School Board, including support from some conservatives, other people were sounding a note of caution. State Superintendent Thomas Pullen, who had worked with Abbe and the MCCPTA on the Supervisor of School Property issue, worried about one county having different rules from the others and also was prescient in his fear that the elections would “inject politics into the school system.”<sup>99</sup> Future elections would prove Pullen correct; they became a key site for organized groups of people to publicly argue about the present and future of the school system. During these biannual elections candidates and activists promoted their own educational visions and disparaged others, and this heightened concern among the electorate about the perils of choosing the wrong course. The liberal reformers' principled faith in democracy obscured how the messier, uglier side of campaigns and elections could affect people's opinions about the trajectory of the public schools.

Some of the staunchest pro-Charter activists whose arguments in favor of home rule were being appropriated by the MCCPTA were actually against placing control of the School Board into the hands of the local electorate. Lewis Sims, who worked on behalf of the Charter for several years, wrote to his State Senator in 1951 to urge him to oppose the bill creating the elected School Boards. Sims believed that a longer ballot would confuse voters, and that since the County Council was the sole

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<sup>99</sup> Pullen repeated these warnings in 1951, when the bill was ultimately passed. *Washington Post* “Blow Given To Electoral Board Plan” March 1, 1951, 16.

agency allowed to tax and legislate its members should be the only ones who stood before the voters.<sup>100</sup> The Charterites made very specific requests during their push for home rule and at least some of them did not intend their logic to be appropriated and extended by the educational activists.

Other county residents were also concerned. Irene Sandifer, whose appointment to the Board had irked some MCCPTA members, believed that the appointment system was a way to ensure that dedicated and knowledgeable individuals were in charge of the system. This concern highlighted the dissonance within MCCPTA's dual reform initiatives concerning elected School Boards as well as the preference for credentialed experts running the administration. Sandifer also worried that elections could be hijacked by candidates concerned about their own career advancement or about a single educational issue, and would be less willing to place the good of the whole system ahead of these narrow goals.<sup>101</sup> Sandifer noted the substantial migration into the county and worried that educational politics could breed distrust and conflict among new neighbors. The topic of education could inspire strong opinions about moral, ethical, and financial priorities and, without the trust and collegiality that came from knowing one's neighbors, disagreements about education could potentially provoke hurt feelings and resentment.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Sims noted that a workable solution might be to allow the County Council to appoint the School Board members themselves. He also worried that if the School Board was to be elected, other Boards, like the Board of Libraries and Board of Health might also follow, creating an unwieldy and unworkable long ballot. See letter of Lewis Sims to state senator DeWitt Hyde, 3/12/1951, MCA, RG 18, MCCC, Box 1, Folder: May-December, 1951, 2-3.

<sup>101</sup> Transcript of Oral History interview with Irene Sandifer, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 4, 40.

<sup>102</sup> Transcript of Oral History interview with Irene Sandifer, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 4, 40-41. Also see transcript of Oral History interview with Guy Jewell, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 45-46.

All of these concerns about an elected School Board came to fruition very soon after the elected Board was established. Sandifer's concerns, in particular, correctly anticipated the tensions inherent to the kind of local control that the activists who pushed for Board elections failed to appreciate. People like Leslie Abbe were focused on the fact that the appointed Board had been comprised of "inferior people who were under the thumb" of Lee's political machine.<sup>103</sup> Abbe was certain that the well-educated Montgomery County populace could be trusted to make sound and reasonable choices for the educational leadership of their public schools. The liberal activists had faith in democracy and were confident that giving the people the ultimate authority to decide the composition of the School Board would produce a superior governing apparatus. The messiness of democratic elections, the peripheral issues that could attract intense focus, the animosity that could develop between factions, the fundamental disagreements about what "good schools" meant and the ways to achieve them: these did not deter the proponents of an elected Board.

The liberal activists commenced lobbying the Montgomery County delegation in Annapolis to introduce a bill before the General Assembly that would allow the citizens of the county to vote on whether they wanted to establish an elected School Board.<sup>104</sup> The bill was defeated in committee in the spring of 1949, but two years later the MCCPTA renewed its push, this time joined by the League of Women

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<sup>103</sup> Transcript of Oral History interview with Leslie Abbe, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 1, 13.

<sup>104</sup> The first legislative attempt occurred in the fall of 1948, with an eye on the spring 1949 session of the General Assembly. The initial bill proposed that the Assembly pass legislation allowing the voters in Montgomery County to decide the issue during the 1950 general election. *Washington Post*, "P-TA Group Offers New School Bill," October 13, 1948, B1; also *Washington Post*, "County Bill to Ask Elected School Board," January 12, 1949, B8.; *Washington Post*, "School Board Bill Due to be Defeated," March 12, 1949, 11.



Voters, the Civic Federation, and others who had helped in the Charter fight to bring a larger contingency to Annapolis to testify.<sup>105</sup> Dr. Pullen, the state Superintendent, testified in opposition but the reformers' arguments prevailed and the state legislature voted to let the citizenry in Montgomery County decide the issue.<sup>106</sup> That fall, with no other election happening, 7,272 out of 59,404 registered voters turned out at the polls.<sup>107</sup> 5,626 voters, largely mobilized by the MCCPTA and the Civic Federation, voted to establish the elected Board.<sup>108</sup> The margin of victory was substantial, but the turnout of around twelve per cent of the County's registered voters indicates that there was hardly a groundswell of interest in the issue of elected School Boards.<sup>109</sup> In some ways, this was a remarkable victory for the MCCPTA. A handful of

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<sup>105</sup> *Washington Post* "County Plan for Elected School Body Given Nod," January 12, 1951, B1. Also *Washington Post*, "Montgomery School Board Bill Offered," February 3, 1951, 2. The Civic Federation submitted a resolution, formally endorsing the MCCPTA's position on the issue and urging legislators to pass the bill establishing an elected school board. MCA, RG 18, MCCF, Series III: Committees, Box 2, Folder: Schools, 1941-1956. Theodore McKeldin, the newly-elected Republican governor of Maryland, indicated in January 1951 that although he personally preferred appointed School Boards he would not oppose Montgomery's effort to establish an elected Board. The last vestiges of the Lee machine had been destroyed; that year, for the first time in decades, the Montgomery County delegation to Annapolis was entirely Republican. Although the Democrats would return to prominence quickly thereafter, the push for Charter and home rule temporarily removed the Democrats from power.

<sup>106</sup> Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space*, 261-263. Also see transcript of Oral History interview with Leslie Abbe, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 1, 16. According to Abbe, the Baltimore City delegation lent its support to the initiative in exchange for the Montgomery County delegation's support on some other issue; also, the folks from Baltimore noted that the Charter had recently been passed and that the folks in Montgomery County seemed to be intent upon trying something new. Also see *Washington Post*, "Montgomery Elected School Board Bill Wins in First House Test; Committee Vote Upset," March 8, 1951, C13.

<sup>107</sup> A local resident, Lillian McNish, wrote a letter to the editor of the *Post* complaining that the special voting session on the referendum was costing taxpayers \$18,000 when the issue could simply have waited until 1952 to be decided. *Washington Post*, Letters to the Editor, October 28, 1951, B4.

<sup>108</sup> Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space*, 263.

<sup>109</sup> As a point of comparison, just one year earlier about 39,000 voters, out of 57,675 registered, turned out to vote in the County Council elections. See chart, "1950 Registration and Votes" MCA, RG 18, MCCC, Box 1, Folder: October-December, 1950.

determined citizens had managed to enact a major transformation in the governance of the county's school system. Considering that over sixty per cent of the County's budget was spent on education, it is striking that barely ten per cent of the county's eligible voters could overturn a policy of gubernatorial-appointed School Boards that had existed since the nineteenth century.<sup>110</sup>

Between 1946 and 1951 liberal educational activists had accomplished two major initiatives. The elected School Board was obviously a major reform, the effect of which would dramatically alter educational politics in the county for decades. Also, the campaign to install Richard Carpenter as the Supervisor of School Property signaled a clear preference among the reformers for the school system administration to employ credentialed experts who could carry out their duties in an efficient and professional manner. The reformers would continue to push for changes in this vein later in the 1950s, as will be discussed in Chapter Two. There was significant tension between these paired undertakings. Local elections were by no means guaranteed to result in experts installed atop the school system's hierarchy, while the choices that dispassionate bureaucrats might make to run the school system could very well be misunderstood or disapproved of by the electorate. Going forward, the people running the school system would have to grapple with these conflicting realities at the precise moment that the system was experiencing rapid growth.

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<sup>110</sup> There will be more discussion of county budgeting, and the size of the pie that went to education, in Chapter Three of this dissertation. In 1952, sixty-two per cent of the county's budget was dedicated to education, a percentage that would increase in subsequent years. MCA, RG 2, County Council Printed Material, Box 1, Annual Report, 1952. Jewell notes that in the 1870s the county did popularly elect their School Board members before reverting to the governor's appointment procedure in 1886. Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space*, 316-317.

An important goal of the liberal reformers was to assert more local control over the school system and to make the schools more reflective of and responsive to the people in Montgomery County. On this front they succeeded, although perhaps in ways that they did not anticipate. During the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s new groups of people organized themselves into rival activist organizations and joined the MCCPTA in the arena of educational politics, including African Americans, economic and educational conservatives, and public school teachers. The liberals' preference for a progressive educational program and an expanded bureaucracy run according to scientific managerial principles would be challenged by alternative visions of "good schools" articulated by these new activists. The school system was indeed responsive to and representative of a county population whose members had varying opinions about education, and the contentious era of educational politics that began in the 1950s shattered the tranquil consensus that Edwin Broome had presided over. As Montgomery County grew into a prosperous suburban enclave, the escalating conflicts over education caused residents to gradually grow more concerned about the present state and future of their public schools.

**Chapter Two**  
**Deliberately Speedy:**  
**Desegregation and Administrative Reorganization of Montgomery County**  
**Public Schools in the 1950s**

The reforms to the administration of the Montgomery County Public Schools in the late 1940s, including the establishment of an elected School Board, the adoption of merit-based hiring, and an increased emphasis on professional managerial protocols, reflected the preferences of many recent arrivals to the county. These white, well-educated, middle-class liberals organized themselves in the Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations (MCCPTA) and quickly found success lobbying school officials and influencing the School Board elections they had helped to establish. For reformers who preferred dispassionate and objective administrative policies, placing control of the School Board in the hands of the electorate was perhaps short-sighted; the liberal reformers dominated the first years of Board elections, but soon the passions and determination of other interested citizens began to creep into the world of local educational politics. Before long other groups of activists, with their own educational visions and prescriptions, began to challenge the liberals' control over the system.

The top priority for the liberal reformers during the 1950s was managing the growth of the school system. Richard Carpenter, the Supervisor of School Property handpicked by MCCPTA leaders in 1946, presided over a five-year period when enrollment in the public schools more than doubled, from 18,546 in 1947 to 42,605 in 1953.<sup>1</sup> Enrollment rose to over 80,000 by 1960 and eventually reached a peak of over

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<sup>1</sup> *These Are Your Schools* (Rockville: MD, Montgomery County Board of Education, 1954), 6. Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park.

126,000 students in 1973.<sup>2</sup> In order to accommodate the anticipated influx of students, starting in the early 1950s the school officials had to build dozens of schools and hire hundreds of teachers and administrators. The liberal activists believed this period of growth should be managed by an objective and professionally run educational bureaucracy, and in 1955 school officials, responding to pressure from the MCCPTA, contracted with McKinsey and Company to do an external review of the school system and recommend changes to the administration that would improve efficiency of the bureaucratic apparatus.

This wave of reform that began in the 1940s and continued in the 1950s was directed at only one of the two public school systems. Like the other counties in Maryland and elsewhere across the South, Montgomery County operated separate schools for black and white students. Both school systems were controlled and administered by the same School Board and ostensibly given equal consideration and treatment, but in practice the Board members, school administrators, and liberal reformers focused their attention on the white schools. They were not staunch segregationists – in fact, many of the down-county suburbanites accepted integration and the MCCPTA advocated immediate and total desegregation a few months after *Brown* – but before 1954 the education of black people was not a priority for most members of white Montgomery County.

Black county residents had a long history of educational activism and worked for decades to fashion the best possible education for their children. Their goal was a

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<sup>2</sup> “A Lay Citizens’ Report on Curriculum,” Final Report, Volume 1, August, 1961, 15. McKeldin Library, University of Maryland, College Park. Also see *Washington Post*, “Montgomery Plan Lists 34 Schools to Close,” May 23, 1981, B8. Also see Montgomery County Archives (MCA), RG 13, Office of Public Information, Box 9, Tape 320, “Operating Budget,” 11/28/76.

school system that was in every way as good as the white school system: schools that truly were separate but equal. By 1954 a network of black parents, teachers, and church leaders had years of experience working to improve their schools and plenty of opinions about education. They saw the *Brown* decision as an opportunity to contribute to the development of a new school system that educated black and white children and was governed and administered with input by black and white people. Many interested blacks believed that the Supreme Court decision meant that desegregated public schools could be a path towards racial equality in society, and they hoped a desegregated MCPS would take seriously the challenges of educating black and white children together. They realized that because black students had had an inferior educational experience prior to *Brown*, specific steps might be needed to make sure black students succeeded in the newly-desegregated schools. These black activists had a specific educational vision that focused on ensuring an excellent education for black children, a distinctly different vision of good schools from the one promoted by the liberals in the MCCPTA.

The white liberal majority in the county saw desegregation through the lens of their preexisting preferences for an educational bureaucracy run according to dispassionate professional managerial principles. Somewhat clumsily, these liberal reformers believed that the best way to handle desegregation was to treat the consolidation of two school systems as a logistical and administrative challenge. The impulse behind their initial push for reform to the county's school system, which sought to use objective professionalism to ensure a sound school system for everyone, was extended to the challenge of desegregation, and in the eyes of the liberal

reformers the way to achieve fairness and equality was to ignore racial difference as much as possible.

Because the school system was adding thousands of students every year in response to the baby boom and continuing migration into the county by white families, finding room for 3,000 black students starting in 1955 seemed like nothing more than an additional logistical hurdle to the white liberals. Simply putting these black children into a white school would, the liberal reformers believed, provide the black children with the same educational opportunities enjoyed by the white children. The ideas that blacks and whites going to school together might require a fundamental reevaluation of the educational program, or that black children might require different pedagogical, curricular, or counseling initiatives, were hardly considered by the white liberal majority who controlled the system. The black educational leaders found their hopes of collaborative input largely ignored by the white community. Black educational activists were frustrated by the desegregation process but did what they could to make sure their concerns were heard by the white liberal majority. In so doing, blacks emerged as the first distinct group of county residents to organize around and articulate a vision of good schools and a path to achieve them that directly challenged the control over the system enjoyed by the white middle-class liberals.

The different responses to *Brown* from members of the black and white communities in Montgomery County echoed the different ways that blacks and whites interpreted the decision across the United States. Staunch segregationists, of course, objected to *Brown* and all other attempts to integrate society outright, but for

other white people the situation was more complicated. Some white liberals opposed segregation and bigotry, but they thought, like the white liberals in Montgomery County, that desegregation meant allowing blacks into the formerly white institutions like schools. Simply opening the schoolhouse door was enough; once inside, everyone had an equal opportunity to succeed, and for many white liberals the chief concern was to manage the addition of black people to white America with as little disruption as possible. The liberals in Montgomery County were in some ways similar to liberals across the country that agreed in principle with the *Brown* decision but were cautious in their approach to its implementation.<sup>3</sup>

But blacks had an entirely different perspective, developed during years of discrimination, racism, and inferior treatment. Official pronouncements like *Brown* and nominal policy changes allowing blacks into schools were but the first step; the real challenge of integration was ensuring that black people truly did have an equal opportunity to succeed in the formerly all-white world. Black people were acutely aware that segregation had consigned blacks to sub-par schools, public facilities, housing, and employment opportunities for decades. Addressing this systematic

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to instances of “massive resistance” in areas of the South, the process of desegregation unfolded with less confrontational but no less complicated responses from white people across the country. For more on the complicated white reaction to the Civil Rights movement in general and school desegregation in particular see, for example, Howell S. Baum, *Brown in Baltimore: School Desegregation and the Limits of Liberalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010); Matthew D. Lassiter and Andrew B. Lewis, eds. *The Moderates Dilemma: Massive Resistance to School Desegregation in Virginia* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1999); Anna Victoria Wilson and William E. Segall, *Oh, Do I Remember! Experiences of Teachers During the Desegregation of Austin’s Schools, 1964-1971* (Albany, NY: SUNY-Albany Press, 2001); William Henry Keller, *Make Haste Slowly: Moderates, Conservatives, and School Desegregation in Houston* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press, 1999); Forrest R. White, *Pride and Prejudice: School Desegregation and Urban Renewal in Newark, 1950-1959* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992); Jason Sokol, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975* (New York: Knopf, 2006); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Matthew D. Lassiter, *Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).



inequality would require specific initiatives designed to help black people overcome the hardships and handicaps of discrimination that had previously circumscribed their opportunities. In terms of schooling, black children were not assured an equal educational opportunity simply by being allowed to attend a white school; everything about the school had to be reevaluated with a focus on ensuring racial equality. Far from the white liberal perspective of welcoming blacks into the status quo, the black perspective viewed the status quo as part of the segregated past and irreconcilable with the idea of an integrated society.<sup>4</sup>

The struggles of the Civil Rights Movement incorporated the different perspectives on integration held by white liberals and black people, and disputes over how to promote and ensure racial equality extended well into the 1970s in the form of fights over mandatory busing, Black Studies curricula and affirmative action hiring policies. Chapter Five of this dissertation will discuss how disputes over the “Action Steps” taken to address the black experience in Montgomery County Public Schools in the 1970s contributed to a particularly contentious election season in 1978. This chapter explores the initial reaction to desegregation by blacks and liberal whites in Montgomery County and shows how these differing perspectives affected discussions

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<sup>4</sup> African-Americans across the United States had a long history of educational activism prior to *Brown*, and there is a wide and varied scholarly literature on this topic. For a small sample of these, see Nina Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County, Maryland, 1872-1961* (New York: Vantage, 1978); David S. Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road: Hyde County, North Carolina, and the Fate of Black Schools in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Jerelyne Castleberry Williams, *The Brackenridge Colored School: A Legacy of Empowerment Through Agency and Cultural Capital Inside an African American Community* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2006); Clinton Cox, *African-American Teachers* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1999); Titus Brown, *Faithful, Firm and True: African American Education in the South* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002).

about educational excellence, highlighting the line that separated liberal whites and black activists when it came to reforming their school system in the mid-1950s.

Blacks were, in fact, hardly a new voice when it came to education, but between 1872, when the first public school for black students in the county opened, and the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, Montgomery County maintained two segregated school systems as required by Maryland state law.<sup>5</sup> During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the county's black population held constant at around ten percent of the county's residents. The adults mostly lived and worked in the rural up-county area as farmhands and domestic laborers, and they were typically joined in work by their children during the spring planting and fall harvesting seasons. The ramshackle one-room black schools were full of children only in January, February, and March; during the rest of the school year the majority of black children worked in order to contribute to the household income.<sup>6</sup> Although their parents valued education, necessity mandated truncated school years and early graduations for most black children or, in many cases, no graduations at all.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> There had been some private black schools operating in the county, dating back to the early 1800s. Most of these were run by local Quakers, and in 1866 the Quakers worked with the Freedmen's Bureau to establish a vocational/industrial school. The Maryland General Assembly voted to appropriate \$50,000 of black real estate and state funding for public schools for black people in 1872, beginning the era of segregated school systems. Warrick S. Hill, *Before Us Lies the Timber: The Segregated High School of Montgomery County, Maryland, 1927-1960* (Silver Spring, MD: Bartleby Press, 2003), 33.

<sup>6</sup> Reverend James Prather, from a large up-county black family who would eventually lend their name to Prathertown, recalled in an oral history interview that when he was growing up in the 19-teens and 20s, most black students went to school for three months, January, February, and March. If their own families didn't have farms, other local farmers paid them to work during the planting and harvesting seasons. Transcript of Oral History interview with James Prather, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 4, 9.

<sup>7</sup> In practice, this meant a couple of things. First, once some black students got to a certain age, they simply didn't bother going to school at all, and in 1926 Montgomery County had a higher dropout rate among black students than the state average, even while the county boasted the highest statewide percentage of white students completing at least seven grades. Ray Eldon Heibert and

The black school system was nominally controlled by the same Montgomery County School Board that ran the white schools, but in practice the Board refused to allocate county taxpayer dollars to the black schools, most likely because many whites did not want their tax dollars spent on the black system.<sup>8</sup> Funding for black schools came from the state and was supplemented by donations from members of the black community and the occasional sympathetic white resident.<sup>9</sup> Each black school was represented by a group of “trustees,” a committee of local black parents and church leaders who, due to the Board’s ongoing lack of interest, made many of the decisions governing the day-to-day operations of the schools. Lack of funds was a perennial obstacle for the trustees, and money earmarked for a teacher’s salary was often used for routine school repairs.<sup>10</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, 10 of the 30 black

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Richard K. MacMaster, *A Grateful Remembrance: The Story of Montgomery County, Maryland* (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Government and Montgomery County Historical Society, 1976), 279. A second problem of the “seasonal student” practice would crop up during the desegregation years of the mid-1950s, when many black students were found to be two or three grade levels below their ages would indicate. Some whites took this as an indication of a lack of aptitude among blacks, but it is also likely that blacks were behind in school because even as late as the 1950s the rural character of the up-county area had not changed and many blacks were still working on farms during planting and harvesting season.

<sup>8</sup> According to Warrick Hill, when the black public school system was created in 1872, “money from white taxpayers could not be used for the education of black children,” a statement which seems to imply that it was illegal for the Board to allocate locally-raised money for the black schools. Hill, *Before Us Lies the Timber*, p. 33-34. Even if Hill exaggerates the prohibition, Nina Clarke and Guy Jewell, authors of histories of the black school system and of public schools in the county, respectively, concur that prior to desegregation the local School Board took great pains not to spend money garnered from local (white) taxpayers on the black school system.

<sup>9</sup> For example, in 1898-99, the State of Maryland allocated \$7,477.44 for the black schools in the county. This money, along with donations from the black community, funded the black educational program that year. Nina Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County, Maryland, 1872-1961* (New York: Vantage, 1978), 17.

<sup>10</sup> Inability to pay the teacher her full salary commonly meant an early end to the school year. Guy Jewell notes that the practice of ending the school year early and beginning it late was common throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. E. Guy Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space: A History of Montgomery County Schools From 1732-1965* (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Public Schools, 1976), 132. Also see Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 11, also 22.

schools had no running water, more than half had unsanitary toilet facilities, 16 did not have enough seats, and nearly all faced a shortage of textbooks, maps, and other basic supplies.<sup>11</sup> Because the Board was extremely reluctant to construct new school buildings for blacks, the trustees in some areas used local black churches to house their primary schools.<sup>12</sup>

In 1866 a group of Quakers created a private vocational/technical school for black youths that closed in 1885 due to lack of funds. Around the turn of the century, members of the black community pushed to have the school reopened as a public vocational school for black teens. Local donations were supplemented by \$3000 in state funding to open the Maryland Normal and Agricultural Institute at Sandy Spring in 1908. The first principal, George Williams, had attended the Hampton Institute and was a disciple of Booker T. Washington. Under Williams, the school initiated programs in teacher training, agriculture, carpentry, blacksmithing, sewing, dressmaking, and cobbling for black youths from Montgomery and other Maryland counties.<sup>13</sup> A fire destroyed the school in 1922 but it was quickly rebuilt, in part

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<sup>11</sup> In 1912, a Presbyterian church did a survey of all the schools in the county, and reported the shortcomings of the black schools. See Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 36. Guy Jewell recalled in an oral history that the black schools were “the worst you can imagine” during the 1920s and 30s, with the schools in the up-county area being slightly better than in the down-county area. Transcript of Oral History interview with Guy Jewell, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 37.

<sup>12</sup> Heibert and MacMaster, *A Grateful Remembrance*, 246. The authors note that the school and church were the “centers of community activities” and casually notes that they often shared the same building. Clarke, however, fills out the picture that the black churches were used as schools out of necessity, because the Board of Education simply would not pay for construction of new school buildings unless black citizens would sell their land to the Board, “for a pittance.” Rather than relinquish their property, black churches were paid a small amount in “rent” by the Board of Education each year to use them during the week as schools. Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 16, also 21.

<sup>13</sup> For a brief discussion of Williams’ tenure as principal, see Hill, *Before Us Lies the Timber*, 34. Also see Heibert and MacMaster, *A Grateful Remembrance*, 246, and Jewell, *From One Room to*

because some local white residents contributed support for the ongoing vocational training for blacks.<sup>14</sup>

Increasingly tired of neglect from the School Board, the trustees of several schools joined together in the 1920s to form a new organization, United Trustees in Montgomery County.<sup>15</sup> This was the first organization in Montgomery County dedicated to countywide educational activism; an analogous coalition of white P-TAs, the Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations, did not appear for another two decades. The leadership of United Trustees included parents, teachers, and church leaders, and the group focused its attention on three major shortcomings of the black school system: inadequate buildings, the lack of a black high school, and low pay for teachers. By addressing these concerns, the United Trustees sought to offer black children an education that was equal to that which white children received.

Since the Board of Education was unwilling to commit funds for the construction of new school buildings, the United Trustees worked with Superintendent Edwin Broome to find other sources of funding. An important resource was the Rosenwald Fund, created in 1917 by Julius Rosenwald, the President of Sears, Roebuck. The Rosenwald Fund was a nonprofit organization

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*Open Space*, 181; Jewell mentions that the state funds for the reopening of the vocational school were contingent upon allowing students from other counties to attend.

<sup>14</sup> Hill, *Before Us Lies the Timber*, 35. See also Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 24-26, where the author notes the support of the white community for the vocational school. Such sympathy was not evident among all of the county's white residents, however; efforts to construct a second vocational school in the down-county area of Wheaton in 1910 were stymied by resistance from local white residents. Jewell notes that the Colesville-Wheaton project was "abandoned at the earnest solicitation of one hundred and fifty tax-paying, property owners who reside in the Colesville and Wheaton Districts." Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space*, 181.

<sup>15</sup> Clarke, *History of Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 44. In 1936 United Trustees renamed itself the Federation of Parent-Teacher Associations.

dedicated to improving living conditions and educational opportunities for blacks in the South and had contributed millions of dollars towards the construction of more than 5,000 schools for black children as well as homes for black teachers and vocational centers across the region.<sup>16</sup> Broome became familiar with the architectural specifications favored by Fund administrators, and during the 1920s and 1930s 17 new schools were constructed in Montgomery County using a combination of Rosenwald funds and donations solicited from the black community by the United Trustees.<sup>17</sup>

Prior to the mid-1920s, education for blacks ended after the seventh grade, and not many made it that far. The exception to this was the vocational school at Sandy Spring, but the United Trustees had something more in mind. They wanted a comprehensive high school, similar to those that educated white children, with vocational, general, and academic instructional programs available to all of the county's black youths. The United Trustees raised \$6,700 from the black community and petitioned Broome to secure Rosenwald funds to cover the construction costs on what would become the yellow two-room Rockville Colored High School.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Rosenwald was the president of Sears, Roebuck in 1917, but the fund was his own personal creation, not affiliated with Sears. Hill, Warrick S., *Before Us Lies the Timber*, p. 35. For more on white philanthropy funding educational initiatives for Southern blacks, see Eric Anderson and Alfred A Moss, Jr., *Dangerous Donations: Northern Philanthropy and Southern Black Education, 1902-1930* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Guy Jewell talks about how Edwin Broome made sure that any plans for a new school conformed to the guidelines established by Sears, Roebuck for the Rosenwald funds. Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space*, 278-279. Nina Clarke has more detail, including a list of all of the schools constructed with Rosenwald assistance, in *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 43-44.

<sup>18</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that some state dollars also went towards the construction of the new building. See Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 44-46. Also, Warrick Hill showers praise on the tireless and persistent lobbying of United Trustees, *Before Us Lies the Timber*, 104-105. Rockville Colored High School operated from 1927-1935, at which time it

Completed in 1927, Rockville Colored High offered black students a similar high school experience that white students had access to, including academic, general, and vocational curricular options; activities like choral groups and sports teams; institutions like a school newspaper and social clubs; and graduation ceremonies in the springtime with pomp and circumstance.<sup>19</sup>

In 1936, the United Trustees renamed itself the Federation of Parent-Teacher Associations and joined with the Colored Teachers Association to demand that the School Board rectify a major disparity between the black and white school systems: the unequal salary schedule for teachers.<sup>20</sup> The Federation and CTA knew that many of the county's black teachers had comparable experience and credentials to their white counterparts and believed that black teachers deserved equal compensation.<sup>21</sup> On December 8, 1936 William Gibbs, a black teacher and principal of the Rockville Colored Elementary School, filed a petition with the School Board requesting that his salary be made comparable to that of a white educator with Gibbs's credentials and experience. Gibbs held a degree from West Chester Teachers College in Pennsylvania and taught in the county for five years. In his petition he noted that his

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was replaced by a new building and renamed Lincoln High School. Lincoln was converted into a junior high in 1950 when the brand-new Carver High School was built; Carver served as the high school during the desegregation years, for the students who did not initially attend white schools.

<sup>19</sup> In *Before Us Lies the Timber*, Warrick Hill provides a thorough discussion of how the black high school strove to provide the black students with all of the "high school experiences" that their white counterparts enjoyed, from curricular offerings to social clubs to dances and sporting activities. These activities, like the rest of the black school system, were almost entirely funded by the black community and received very little support from Montgomery County Public Schools.

<sup>20</sup> The CTA had existed since the late nineteenth century, and had been requesting equal pay since 1920. Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 50.

<sup>21</sup> According to petition filed by William Gibbs, 97.9 per cent of black teachers and 98.4 per cent of white teachers held the same basic credential, called a "first grade certificate," which was a standard teaching certificate issued by the state of Maryland. Clarke, *History of Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 53.

annual salary was \$612 while a white teacher with a comparable resume received \$1,125.<sup>22</sup> The only justification for the dual salary structures, concluded Gibbs, was that the Board of Education in Montgomery County was discriminating against black teachers based on the color of their skin in violation the state constitution.

The Board argued that the disparity was because the black school year was shorter than the white one, since many black children worked on local farms during the spring and fall. However, simply extending the black school year would not level the salary structure, and after the Board delayed taking action on his petition Gibbs contacted NAACP lawyers Thurgood Marshall and Leon Ransom to prepare a legal challenge. In July of 1937, just before the case was about to go forward, Broome sat down with Marshall and Ransom and negotiated a memorandum of agreement stipulating that the Board would adopt a single salary structure for all teachers, regardless of race, creed, or color by August of 1938, and move immediately to begin increasing the salaries of black teachers.<sup>23</sup> In exchange, Gibbs agreed not to pursue his lawsuit.<sup>24</sup>

Despite some successes, black community leaders continued to face an uphill battle in their efforts to provide black children with an equal education. In 1938, the

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<sup>22</sup> Clarke, *History of Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 51.

<sup>23</sup> Guy Jewell gives Broome credit for trying to finesse the situation by offering to extend the black school year; Jewell also credits Broome with hashing out the agreement with the NAACP lawyers and avoiding a trial. Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space*, 278. Also, Margaret Jones recalled the Gibbs lawsuit and was similarly generous in her recollection of Broome's mediation, suggesting that he thought equal pay was "the decent thing to do" and so he made it happen. See transcript of Oral History interview with Margaret Jones, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 11.

<sup>24</sup> Nina *History of Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 53-55, also Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space*, 278. Clarke also notes a jarring postscript to this story: one year later Gibbs was fired as principal, and he wound up leaving the county. According to Clarke, there was a "consensus of opinion of the black people of Montgomery County" that Gibbs had been fired because he had brought the lawsuit against the County, although Clarke provides no evidentiary support for this assertion.



year after Gibbs settled with the county, the county still spent about half as much per pupil in the black schools as they spent in on white students.<sup>25</sup> Black schools remained chronically undersupplied with textbooks and other materials. The first kindergarten for black students was established in 1951, almost thirty years after the first white kindergarten program began.<sup>26</sup> The School Board made substantial investments during the first decades of the twentieth century in larger and more modern physical plants for white schools, but even with the Rosenwald-funded schools replacing some of the oldest buildings black students continued to make do with one-room schools well into the 1940s.<sup>27</sup> When the *Brown* decision was handed down the top priority of black educational activists was the construction of larger school buildings that could house more students along with amenities like libraries, cafeterias, and multipurpose rooms.

The black community in Montgomery County demonstrated, through their ongoing financial support and their persistent efforts to improve their schools, a strong commitment to education of black children. They were hamstrung by prejudice and segregation but this did not deter them from seeking the best educational opportunities for their children throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The *Brown* decision seemed like a potential opportunity for the black

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<sup>25</sup> Heibert and MacMaster, *A Grateful Remembrance*, 343.

<sup>26</sup> The white kindergartens were established in 1926, although they were not universally adopted in the county until just after WWII. Transcript of oral history interview with Guy Jewell, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, p. 15.

<sup>27</sup> Margaret Jones recalled teaching as many as 56 students in the Scotland school during the 1930s. Transcript of oral history interview with Margaret Jones, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 7-8. White school expansion is discussed in Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space*, see photos on 227-229, also 236, which notes that in 1910 the Board of Education formally moved toward a policy of “consolidation” for white schools; black leaders would push for consolidation of black schools into the post-WWII era.

community to build upon its history of activism and contribute to the plans to desegregate the public schools in Montgomery County. However, the black Federation of Parent-Teacher Associations and other black community leaders were frustrated because the white liberal majority in the county had their own ideas about how to handle desegregation.

Both black and white educational activists used similar strategies and techniques to initiate reforms to the segregated school systems prior to *Brown*. Representatives from organizations like the black Federation of Parent-Teacher Associations and the white Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations raised funds, petitioned school officials, and attended public hearings. But the MCCPTA introduced a new way to affect change by working to establish School Board elections in 1951. The white liberal suburbanites had a significant numerical advantage over both the black community as well as the rural up-county white conservatives during the 1950s, and during the first years of School Board elections an MCCPTA endorsement was a key indicator of success for a candidate.<sup>28</sup> With a School Board packed with sympathetic liberals and an inexperienced and overmatched new Superintendent replacing the retiring Edwin Broome in 1953, the white middle-class suburban liberals who dominated the MCCPTA exerted strong influence over the trajectory of the public school system during the 1950s.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space*, 261-265. The 1958 election and the role of the local NAACP and other black leaders are discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>29</sup> The close relationship between school officials and the MCCPTA was demonstrated in several ways. Guy Jewell, in *From One Room to Open Space*, chronicles the first few years of School Board elections, culminating in the influential 1962 campaign. His narrative does not explicitly mention every candidate that the MCCPTA endorsed, but he does give descriptions of the educational and political leanings of the winning candidates, nearly all of whom seem to map closely onto that expressed by the MCCPTA. Jewell does note that the MCCPTA was a strong force in educational

As Montgomery County transformed into a thriving and bustling suburb during the post-WWII era, the liberal professionals who constituted a majority of the county's residents relied on their faith in professionally-managed public institutions to meet the challenge of unprecedented growth. Between 1951 and 1959, the county constructed 66 new schools and 138 additions were made to existing schools as the school system added more than 5,000 new students every year.<sup>30</sup> The MCCPTA wanted this growth to be overseen by a school system administration with clear lines of authority, explicit policies and procedures for daily operations, and an emphasis on efficiency and professionalism among the personnel. The *Brown* decision came in the middle of this wave of growth and reform, and the immediate reaction of the black and white educational activists to *Brown* foreshadowed the different approaches that the two groups would have to the challenge of desegregation.

The local NAACP called for immediate and complete desegregation of schools, including the professional staff of teachers and administrators, and black educational leaders in the Federation of Parent-Teacher Associations were eager to help shape the development of the newly desegregated system. They hoped that

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politics during this time. *From One Room to Open Space*, 261-274. Also, the two academic researchers who studied the School Board election in Montgomery County in 1962, note that "it was generally felt in the county that the School Board was entirely in the hands of the 'liberals'" during the 1950s. Keith Goldhammer and Frank Farner, *The Jackson County Story* (Eugene, OR: University of Oregon Press, 1965), 33. MCCPT members attended public hearings in large numbers and were actively involved in the ad-hoc lay committees that MCPS officials initiated to study particular aspects of the school system. For example, the lay committee report on curriculum in 1960-61 notes that there were "numerous requests" from local P-TAs to speak with members of the committee and get updates on how the study was going, and P-TA presidents were provided with frequent draft reports. "A Lay Citizens Report on Curriculum" Final Report, Volume 1, August 1961, 8. McKelden Library, University of Maryland, College Park.

<sup>30</sup> *This Is Montgomery County, Maryland*, League of Women Voters pamphlet, 1960, 36. McKelden Library, University of Maryland, College Park. Starting around 1950, enrollment grew by at least 5,000 students a year. Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space*, Appendix 5: "Total Number of Pupils Enrolled," 320.

school officials would acknowledge that black students might need additional attention or assistance to meet their learning needs to compensate for the years of inferior education they had received. The white liberals leading the MCCPTA, and the school system officials who tended to agree with these liberal activists, saw things differently. Though many white suburbanites seemed willing to consider rapid desegregation, they saw the transition from two school systems to one through the same prism of managerial efficiency and professionalism that underlay their hoped-for reform of the administrative apparatus.<sup>31</sup>

The white liberals' concern about growth was not shared by blacks for an important reason. Thousands of new students enrolled in the public schools each year, but almost all of these children were white.<sup>32</sup> Restrictive covenants and other forms of prejudice, both legal and extra-legal, made migration into Montgomery County largely impossible for black families. This meant that as the county's overall population grew significantly in the postwar decades the black population remained stagnant; in proportional terms it shrank from around seventeen percent in 1930 to three percent in 1960.<sup>33</sup> Although many of the new white arrivals came from New

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<sup>31</sup> Howell Baum's recent study of desegregation in Baltimore makes a similar point about how the liberal white Baltimore residents saw issues in terms of individuality, and not in terms of race. They chose, with the support of black leaders, to adopt a policy of voluntary integration that allowed students to attend whatever school they wished, a policy that allowed racist whites to select schools with little or no black students. Very quickly the schools in Baltimore wound up re-segregating, through the voluntary choice of both black and white residents. Baum blames a liberal attitude that failed to appreciate how racial dynamics and attitudes needed to be confronted and not submerged beneath an ostensibly "color blind" policy. Howell S. Baum, *Brown in Baltimore: School Desegregation and the Limits of Liberalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> The school-aged population in 1950 was 27,700; in 1960 it was 80,775. "A Lay Citizens Report on Curriculum," Volume 1, August 1961, 15. McKelden Library, University of Maryland, College Park.

<sup>33</sup> The Report published after the Brookings Institution surveyed the county in the late 1930s noted the population numbers for 1930 at 8,266 blacks out of a total population of 49,206. *The*

England, the Mid-Atlantic, and the Midwest and tended to have fairly liberal racial attitudes, racial equality was not a high priority for them. They were more interested in managing the school system's rapid expansion, and the School Board was responsive when the MCCPTA petitioned for an external review of the school system by McKinsey and Company in March of 1955.<sup>34</sup>

In some respects it seems remarkable that the Board moved forward with this initiative when the complicated and necessary business of desegregation practically demanded everyone's full attention. But the decision to contract with McKinsey, hold numerous rounds of public hearings, and ultimately initiate the administrative overhaul the consultants recommended was a priority for the white middle-class liberals. More than that, the attitude that led to the push for administrative reform actually had more of an effect on the way that county officials handled desegregation than the mandate of the *Brown* decision had on how the school system was reorganized. Otherwise put, when it came to desegregation the county's liberal majority put their faith in the same reform initiatives for dispassionate

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*Government of Montgomery County, Maryland: A Survey Made at the Request of the Board of County Commissioners* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1941), 7. The 1960 census notes that 3.2% of the county's citizens were black. *Washington Post* "School Board Seat is Goal of Negroes," June 5, 1970, C1.

<sup>34</sup> In making this request, the MCCPTA seems to have followed in the footsteps of the Civic Federation, whose members had pushed for the Brookings Institution to commence the initial study of county government that had resulted in the Charter movement. See letter from McKinsey & Company to Willard McGraw, President of the BOE, March 4, 1955. MCA, RG 1, County Manager, Series I, Box 2, Folder: McKinsey Report. Also, the MCCPTA had, on behalf of local P-TAs, been arguing for an expanded administrative apparatus, including additional assistant principals and central office staff, to help manage the rapid expansion of the school system. The McKinsey study was only the most visible of these efforts that applied to the central office, but individual appeals to expand the professional administrative staff at particular schools were constantly presented to the School Board and Superintendent. See, for example, letter from the President of the Twinbrook Elementary P-TA to the Superintendent, April 2, 1958. MCA, RG 1: Executive Branch, County Manager, Series I: Subject Files, Box 2, Folder: Board of Education.

professionalism and managerial efficiency that they had supported before desegregation was on anybody's mind.

The Board paid McKinsey \$25,000 to initiate the study in the spring of 1955.<sup>35</sup> That summer representatives from McKinsey descended upon Montgomery County, visiting the MCPS headquarters and individual schools, interviewing several administrators, and consulting the school system's records and ledgers. In the fall, the consultants delivered their final Report to the County Council and School Board, and copies were distributed among the citizenry. Activist groups like the MCCPTA and Civic Federation obtained multiple copies, as did local news outlets and several prominent local individuals and community leaders.<sup>36</sup> The Report made no mention of desegregation, as the task of consolidating two school systems was beyond the stated scope of the study, which was to "identify improvements that would facilitate the provision of public education to the County's residents and also provide a sound basis for assuming the additional work load and responsibilities that growth will create."<sup>37</sup> White residents in the county seemed to agree with the underlying assumption of the McKinsey Report: a well-organized and well-run school system was equipped to handle whatever challenges that might arise, desegregation being simply one of these.

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<sup>35</sup> Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space*, 280-286. It seems worth noting that Jewell spent seven pages discussing the McKinsey study while devoting one short paragraph on p. 277 to a discussion of desegregation.

<sup>36</sup> The distribution list for the Report was mailed to the County Manager, see MCA, RG 1, County Manager, Series I, Box 2, Folder: McKinsey Report. The report was officially titled "A Program for Improving the Montgomery County Public School System" and was delivered by McKinsey to the Montgomery County Board of Education in February, 1956. Within the county, the report became widely known as the "McKinsey Report." MCA, BOE Printed Materials, McKinsey Report, 1955.

<sup>37</sup> McKinsey Report, i.

The McKinsey Report's authors indicated astonishment at the loosely organized administrative hierarchy that existed in Montgomery County Public Schools.<sup>38</sup> All power resided in the hands of the Superintendent and everyone from area supervisors down to individual principals and teachers was accustomed to communicating with the Superintendent directly, a practice held over from Edwin Broome's years running the system.<sup>39</sup> McKinsey urged the county to restructure the administrative flow chart and include more Assistant Superintendents to whom authority could be delegated by the Superintendent for coping with day-to-day operations. As the Report's introduction noted, school operations "have assumed the proportions of big business" and the CEO needed insulation from the mundane if he was to effectively lead.<sup>40</sup>

Likening the school system to a corporation made a certain amount of sense. In terms of organizational complexity, the system's hierarchy of administrators, specialists, principals, teachers, and other personnel followed the typical pyramid shape of a managerial flow chart. McKinsey's specialty was to consult with corporations to evaluate their operating procedures and suggest ways to improve efficiency, and Montgomery County had asked the consulting firm for just those kinds of recommendations. Still, there remained a nagging but significant aspect of

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<sup>38</sup> The *Post* reported that "the 103-page report lashed out against the school administrative setup and fiscal policies, calling for a sweeping reorganization in management." *Washington Post*, "Report Hits at Conduct of Schools" February 22, 1956, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Broome retired in 1953, amid a public outpouring of gratitude and adulation. His replacement, Forbes Norris, had the misfortune of becoming Superintendent at the precise moment that that position was being drained of some of its power. Norris served only one term as Superintendent and was replaced, in 1957, by C. Taylor Whittier, an administrative with extensive experience running large educational systems like the one recommended by McKinsey.

<sup>40</sup> McKinsey Report, p. 1-2. The report's pagination was divided by section; for example, the pages in Section 1 were numbered 1-1 thru 1-6. The pages in Section 2 were numbered 2-1 thru 2-33, and so on.

the school system which was beyond McKinsey's expertise: the educational program itself. The authors of the Report admitted their ignorance, noting that their recommendations were simply noting how "educational services" could be delivered "efficiently and economically if the County's children are to enjoy the opportunities their parents and the County's taxpayers expect them to have."<sup>41</sup> The nature of those educational services went unmentioned, and the possibility that delivering those services required managerial strategies specific to an educational institution was not considered.<sup>42</sup>

The lack of discussion about the nature of educational services is particularly noteworthy when considering the topic of desegregation. The Supreme Court had found that separate school systems were inherently unequal and that compelling black students to attend segregated schools violated their rights to equal protection under the law as guaranteed under the Fourteenth Amendment. Although the initial holding focused on providing black children with an equal educational opportunity to whites by allowing them to attend the same schools, it seemed possible that the presence of these black children would necessarily change the way that teaching and learning occurred within the schools for children of both races. Members of the black community believed this, which led them to push for increased consultation and involvement in the schools and for more black teachers and administrator hires. For

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<sup>41</sup> McKinsey Report, p. 1-1, also 2-1.

<sup>42</sup> Christopher D. McKenna's history of the consulting profession notes how consultants often wound up changing the industries they observed, as their own processes of observation and evaluation affected their recommendations and the way those recommendations were interpreted by businesses and nonprofit organizations. McKenna does not include an example of a school system working with a consulting agency, but his conclusions seem to stand up to the experience in Montgomery County, where the nature of "educational services" was reevaluated by members of the community after reading the McKinsey Report. Christopher D. McKenna *The World's Newest Profession: Management Consulting in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).



the black activists, racial integration demanded that the entire educational program be overhauled with an eye on providing equal educational opportunity to black children who had suffered for years in inferior schools. However, during the initial years of desegregation the white liberals did not acknowledge that desegregation might affect the educational program in a significant way. They seemed to agree with the authors of the McKinsey Report who treated “educational services” as simply a product whose delivery needed to be managed with dispassionate efficiency.

The Report went on to suggest numerous managerial changes, including the creation of a substantially expanded bureaucracy and more centralization and coordination of activities to promote standardization of operating policy. The policies governing the hiring and promoting of new teachers and principals were clarified to include specific qualifications and degree requirements. Clerks and secretaries were added to help school officials deal with all of the reports, requests, and other paperwork that demanded their attention. New Assistant Superintendents were added, overseeing various new positions and duties on the managerial flow chart. Finally, the Report focused on the budgeting process and suggested creating a new position, the Director of Financial Affairs, to handle budgeting. This was particularly important because the MCPS was by far the single largest public institution administered in Montgomery County, accounting for more than half of the county’s annual budget.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> The Report itself is presented in a very structured manner, with the major criticisms and recommendations listed at the beginning and then explained more thoroughly in subsequent sections. See the McKinsey Report, p. 1-3 through 1-6 for initial recommendations; p. 2-1 through 2-33 for initial criticisms.

The standardization of procedures, establishment of clear lines of authority, and emphasis on cost-effectiveness advocated by the McKinsey Report were all reforms that resonated with the liberal middle-class white professionals who had moved to the county in recent decades, at least in theory. Yet the distribution of the Report stirred up a fair amount of discussion and debate within the county about whether McKinsey's dispassionate and business-like approach to educational administration might have failed to capture the particular nature of educational administration.<sup>44</sup> For example, the Report advocated creating Assistant Superintendents of both Secondary and Elementary Schools. From a managerial perspective, this made a certain amount of sense. It divided the school system into two reasonably separate entities, and installed a leader for each division to whom subordinates (principals, other administrators, etc.) could report. But although the division between secondary and elementary education was real, the Superintendent's job was to create a single unified educational program that encompassed the intellectual development of children from Kindergarten through high school. Edwin Broome had done precisely this, and his progressive educational vision had attracted thousands of new residents to the county. Two separate middle managers, each with potentially differing goals and styles, might make it harder for a Superintendent to implement a far-reaching vision. The Director of Financial Affairs presented a similar potential problem: by efficiently streamlining the budgets of various

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<sup>44</sup> Jewell describes the debate about the McKinsey Report as "generating more heat than light," and considering that most of the recommendations were eventually implemented it seems reasonable to wonder how much influence the discussions actually had on the decisions to restructure the administrative hierarchy. Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space*, 280.

departments to save the Superintendent time, the new Director might obscure the financial big picture that the Superintendent needed to see.<sup>45</sup>

Because grassroots democratic pluralism had replaced machine party politics as the primary mechanism governing educational politics in the county, various groups immediately reacted to the McKinsey Report's recommendations. Less than a decade before, the idea that multiple groups, associations, and committees might draft official letters or petitions regarding an educational reform and submit these to the Board of Education would have been unfamiliar to most county residents, but the activism of the MCCPTA had changed the way people thought about their schools. Debates and discussions about educational policies and reforms were now joined by an ever-expanding number of interested groups of people. One obscure McKinsey recommendation, about adopting prefabricated buildings or perhaps hiring an in-house architect, prompted a strongly-worded letter of disapproval from the Potomac Valley Chapter of the American Association of Architects.<sup>46</sup> Broader concerns were expressed by the Montgomery County Civic Federation, whose Education Committee sent a letter to the School Board complaining that the report seemed to have no appreciation of local circumstances and urging the Board to implement its

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<sup>45</sup> These concerns and others were articulated by Thomas Pullen, the State Superintendent of Schools, in a letter to Forbes Norris, the local Superintendent. Pullen railed about McKinsey's obvious ignorance in the matters of educational administration, and feared that adopting the recommendations would "set up an administrative hierarchy that could rival the best bureaucracies in cumbersomeness and ponderosity." That, of course, was what many of the liberal reformers in Montgomery County wanted. Letter from Thomas Pullen to Forbes Norris, 2/16/1956, MCA, RG: 1, County Manager, Box 2, Folder: McKinsey Report.

<sup>46</sup> The architects' letter to the Board, arguing against the McKinsey Report's advocacy for hiring an in-house architect and pre-fabricated buildings, argued that McKinsey's focus on "efficiency" did not appreciate the county's rapid growth nor, more importantly, the particular nature of architectural work. The same letter was sent to the County Manager as well as the BOE. MCA, RG 1, County Manager, Box 2, Folder: McKinsey Report.

recommendations cautiously.<sup>47</sup> Other local groups concurred and argued that the principles of dispassionate scientific management, for all their desirability, needed to be counterbalanced with some consideration of how those principles would affect people in practice. Indeed, this was precisely the point black activists tried to make as the School Board began the process of desegregation.

Ultimately, the Board voted to adopt nearly all of the McKinsey recommendations. School officials reminded the public that the study had been initiated because the existing administrative structure was unacceptable and codified systems and policies were necessary to manage the rapidly-growing school system.<sup>48</sup> The newly adopted administrative flowchart included additions like separate Assistant Superintendents of Secondary and Elementary Education and a Director of Finance.<sup>49</sup> While the Board acknowledged that educational administration differed from corporate administration, it also argued that the similarities between a large (and growing) corporate entity and the MCPS mandated the installation of a more “professional” administrative structure.

Notably absent from the ranks of new administrative positions was an Assistant Superintendent for Human Relations, a position that would eventually be

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<sup>47</sup> MCCF Schools Committee Report on the McKinsey Report, March, 1956. MCA, RG 18, MCCF, Series III, Box 2, Folder: Schools, 1955-1980.

<sup>48</sup> *Washington Post*, “Report Hits at Conduct of Schools” February 22, 1956, 1.

<sup>49</sup> The Board’s appointed a subcommittee of its own members to study the Report, and the objections levied by various parties. This subcommittee’s report recommended the adoption of many of the McKinsey Report’s suggestions, although some – including the in-house architect – were not undertaken. The subcommittee report noted the objections of Pullen and Forbes Norris, the local Superintendent who replaced Broome, and cautioned that the McKinsey recommendations had to be studied carefully to ensure they were consistent with state law, but largely approved of the McKinsey report and undertook to implement some of the recommendations, like hiring an independent attorney for the Board, immediately. A copy of the Subcommittee report is filed along with the McKinsey Report. MCA, BOE Printed Materials.

created in the late 1960s to coordinate school system efforts to address the challenges of educating black and white students together. As will be discussed in Chapter Five, school officials later devoted significant time and resources to problems related to race and racism in the public schools in the 1970s. During the desegregation years of the late 1950s, on the other hand, school system officials opted for what they believed was a color-blind approach that treated all students as equals by ignoring race as much as possible. Although the Board made some token gestures to indicate they were considering black opinions, the decisions they made reflected the liberal preference for treating the addition of black students as a logistical matter.

After the *Brown* decision was announced, the Board created an ad-hoc Advisory Committee on Integration in the summer of 1954; six black leaders with a history of commitment to the black school system were included on the nineteen-person committee.<sup>50</sup> Charged with the task of recommending to the Board a plan for desegregation, the committee held public hearings and solicited opinions from the community during the summer and fall. The following February, a bitterly divided Committee submitted a recommendation signed by only nine of the nineteen

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<sup>50</sup> The State Superintendent of Schools, Thomas Pullen, advised all of the counties in Maryland to wait for the *Brown II* clarification, but also indicated that in his opinion the meaning of *Brown I* was straightforward. The Supreme Court's holding nullified Maryland's law mandating dual school systems, which meant that officials had to consider how, not if, to desegregate. Pullen's statement was issued May 26, 1954. Frederick Luther Dunn, Jr. "Programs and Procedures of Desegregation Developed by the Board of Education, Montgomery County, Maryland" (Doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park, 1959), 28. Frederick Dunn will be discussed in this chapter; he was the Special Assistant to the Superintendent for Integration in Montgomery County from 1954-1958. He took a leave of absence, during the 1958-59 academic year, to write a thesis for a Doctor of Education at the University of Maryland that covered the initial desegregation years. Dunn's dissertation includes several reproduced letters and reports, as well as excerpts from numerous other communications and newspaper articles, and Dunn's work is a valuable source because it provides some original primary source materials as well as the Board's perspective during the desegregation years. Such a perspective is extremely valuable, because many of the other local histories of Montgomery County glide over the desegregation period, perhaps because there was no "massive resistance" or otherwise dramatic (and therefore noteworthy) activities to relate.

members, along with four minority reports authored by groups of two or three dissenters, arguing various methods and approaches to desegregation. The nine-person majority advocated a gradual policy that involved desegregating the kindergartens, or perhaps the first grades, during the 1955-56 school year.<sup>51</sup> The next year, those students would move up a grade, and so in twelve or thirteen years the entire system would be desegregated. All of the minority reports argued for faster desegregation: one wanted immediate and total desegregation, another suggested desegregating the primary schools in one year and the secondary schools the following year, another argued that the majority's approach was too slow but did not provide specific details for speeding it up.<sup>52</sup>

The disagreement among Committee reflected the differences among the residents in Montgomery County when it came to attitudes about desegregation. Many of the white liberal professionals who had recently moved to the down-county suburban area were open to the idea of rapid desegregation.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, the

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<sup>51</sup> For a thorough recounting of the Committee's makeup, deliberations, and final recommendations, see Dunn, "Programs and Procedures of Desegregation," 30-35.

<sup>52</sup> Four of the black members of the committee signed the minority report which suggested desegregating the elementary schools in 1955 and the secondary schools in 1956. The other two black members signed the majority report. Dunn, "Programs and Procedures of Desegregation," 34. Also see Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 109-111.

<sup>53</sup> On October 9, 1954, the MCCPTA voted to recommend to school officials that hiring should proceed regardless of race. *Washington Post*, "P-TA Adopts Policies on Integration," October 10, 1954, M22. The following February, MCCPTA's Executive Committee voted to recommend complete desegregation of the schools in the fall of 1955, although this caused a minor revolt among some of their member PTAs who sent their own letters calling for a more gradual approach. Dunn, "Programs and Procedures of Desegregation," 46. More importantly, immigration into the county by the white liberal professionals, as discussed in Chapter 1, had skewed the population density of the county, and by 1955 the population of the down-county suburbs overwhelmingly outnumbered that of the rural up-county area. Six of the seven School Board members resolved to move ahead with desegregation quickly, reflecting the attitudes of the down-county majority. In 1958, candidates for School Board who were committed to speeding up desegregation all won election, which also indicates significant sympathy among white voters for desegregation. Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 122.

white residents who had lived in the rural up-county region for generations were more accustomed to segregation and suspicious about blacks and whites going to school together. After the MCCPTA Executive Committee, dominated by newly arrived liberals from the down-county suburbs, announced its support for immediate and complete desegregation, some local P-TAs of individual schools in the up-county area issued dissenting statements urging a more gradual approach.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, despite the MCCPTA's official position, some down-county suburbanites agreed with desegregation in principle but were more hesitant when it came to the matter admitting black children to the schools in their neighborhoods.<sup>55</sup>

Reflecting the uncertainty among liberals about how to proceed, many school officials felt uncomfortable with the idea that desegregating the school system was somehow supposed to address broader societal notions of racial inequality. Although the School Board recognized the "moral and democratic implications" of the *Brown* ruling, Board members did not consider their desegregation policy as a conscious

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<sup>54</sup> Dunn, "Programs and Procedures of Desegregation," 46. The views of these up-county residents were most clearly expressed by Harrison King, the School Board member who represented that region of the county. King, alone among School Board members, abstained or voted against numerous Board actions in the fall of 1954 and 1955 and consistently attempted to slow down, if not halt, the progression towards desegregation. Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space*, 267. Also Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 112, who notes that King tried to "call a halt to all this feverish activity."

<sup>55</sup> Desegregation proceeded relatively smoothly save for two isolated incidents, one at Rollingwood Elementary School in the down-county area in 1955 and then at Poolesville School in the up-county area in 1956. At Rollingwood, a handful of parents objected to their school receiving black students by appealing to the state Board of Education and arguing that the local Board had moved too hastily. The state board rejected their appeal, and desegregation proceeded smoothly. At Poolesville, a small group of protesters, influenced by out-of-state agitators, picketed outside the first day of school. Poolesville was in the rural up-county area, and the protesters demanded a hearing before the local Board where they stoked fears of miscegenation. Despite the somewhat colorful rhetoric and the initial disruption on the first day, the protests did not affect the desegregation of the school, which proceeded as planned. Both of these incidents are recounted in Dunn, "Programs and Procedures of Desegregation," 125-157. The *Washington Post* also has coverage of both instances of resistance.

effort to modify the racial attitudes held by individual citizens.<sup>56</sup> To stress this point, the official “Statement of Policy on Integration” adopted by the Board in March of 1955, emphasized “the mechanics, the procedures, and the programs which are used to end a system of schooling where students, because of race, were formerly segregated.”<sup>57</sup> The Board decided to handle desegregation as an administrative transition, a logistical matter of finding seats in the 86 white schools for around 3,000 black children without disrupting the education of the more than 60,000 white children.<sup>58</sup> School system officials hoped to comply with the Supreme Court’s decision in an impersonal, managerial, and administrative fashion, focusing on the logistical matter at hand rather than the larger sociological issues involved.

The county’s black community had a different perspective. They had worked for decades to improve the black schools, and desegregation seemed to open an opportunity for change greater than any they had previously known.<sup>59</sup> The

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<sup>56</sup> The official Statement of Policy on Integration adopted by the Board in March of 1956 is quoted extensively by Dunn; he also notes the Board’s ambivalence about their policy standing in for anything more than the task at hand, which was an educational administrative task, not an attempt to change everyone’s racial attitudes. Dunn, “Programs and Procedures of Desegregation,” 52-60.

<sup>57</sup> Dunn talks about the difference between desegregation and integration, see “Policies and Procedures of Desegregation,” 8.

<sup>58</sup> School construction was occurring extremely rapidly during this era, with several elementary schools and one or two secondary schools opening every year. During the 1955-56 school year, there were 57 white elementary schools and 7 white secondary schools; in addition, 13 white elementary schools and 9 white secondary schools welcomed some black students, bringing the total to 86. An additional 6 all-black schools, four elementary and two secondary, remained open that year as well. See Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 125. The county’s white school-aged population grew precipitously during the 1950s. Between 1955 and 1958, the school population grew from 50,546 to 68,056. During that same time period, the black student population grew from 2,947 to 3,136. Dunn, “Programs and Procedures of Desegregation,” 2-3.

<sup>59</sup> There were isolated examples of blacks who did not want their children to go to “white” schools; one mother who had joined the Nation of Islam complained to Margaret Jones, a black principal and educational leader, about wanting to move to an area where the schools weren’t yet desegregated so her child could go to an all-black school. Transcript of Oral History interview with Margaret Jones, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 6-8, also 17-18. This seems to have been an anomalous opinion, however, as Nina Clarke reports that the NAACP had widespread support in the black community in



Federation of Parent-Teacher Associations and other black activists wanted to see black teachers desegregate the schools along with the students, and they also wanted to contribute suggestions about how the educational needs of the black children might be met by the teachers in the desegregated schools.<sup>60</sup> After working for years to make available an equal education for black students in the county, these activists expected white school officials to incorporate their suggestions into the desegregation policy. They were particularly interested in making sure that black children received an excellent education, and believed that this might require policies specifically focused on black students. Unfortunately, the dwindling size of Montgomery County's black community made it easy for school officials to focus their efforts on crafting a policy that satisfied the white majority.<sup>61</sup>

To oversee desegregation, in March of 1955 the School Board appointed Frederick Dunn to serve as the Special Assistant to the Superintendent for Integration.<sup>62</sup> Dunn was exactly the kind of professional mid-level bureaucrat that the

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Montgomery County as it led the push for swift and immediate desegregation. Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 105-108.

<sup>60</sup> This was some disagreement, both in Montgomery and elsewhere in the nation, about whether *Brown* applied to students only or if it mandated black teachers and administrators. According to Nina Clarke, the Montgomery County NAACP wrote a letter to the School Board on July 9, 1954, urging immediate and total desegregation of both the students and teachers. Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 107.

<sup>61</sup> As previously mentioned, restrictive housing policies made migration into Montgomery County all but impossible for black families, while the arrival of thousands of white families during the 1930s, 40s, and 50s meant that proportionally blacks became a much smaller segment of the population. In 1930 the population included 8,266 blacks out of a total population of 49,206. Brookings Report, 7. The 1960 census notes that 3.2% of the county's citizens were black. *Washington Post* "School Board Seat is Goal of Negroes," June 5, 1970, C1.

<sup>62</sup> The locally-commissioned and written history of Montgomery County from 1776 until 1976 gives desegregation two sentences: "Integration of County schools began without incident in 1954; substandard black schools at Ken-Gar and River Road were phased out quickly. Students and teachers were totally integrated by 1958." Heibert and MacMaster, *A Grateful Remembrance* 347. Guy Jewell's history of Montgomery County's schools from the colonial era, *From One Room to Open*

McKinsey Report had urged the school system to hire, a young and ambitious school administrator who eventually worked for more than twenty years in various jobs in the MCPS. He was tasked with overseeing the Board's integration policy and ensuring that it was implemented with disinterested professionalism, and this suited Dunn's own personal preference for strict adherence to rules and policies.<sup>63</sup> Dunn became the public face of the MCPS effort to desegregate its schools, and he strove to demonstrate that integration would occur in an "orderly and sincere" manner.<sup>64</sup>

Dunn's hiring was announced along with the official release of the Policy Statement on Integration that called for implementing desegregation incrementally, addressing the black elementary and secondary school students separately.<sup>65</sup>

Beginning in 1955, each spring the Board would single out some black elementary schools for closure and disperse the black students from those schools to one of

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*Space* until the late 1960s, provides slightly more information, but also makes it appear as though the transition was smooth and uneventful. Frederick Dunn's doctoral dissertation is the most comprehensive, though it has to be appreciated critically, considering that Dunn was an active participant in the process and clearly had motivation to portray the Board as accommodating, reasonable, and professional in all its dealings.

<sup>63</sup> Fifteen years later, Dunn's reputation as an "educational conservative and strict disciplinarian" was well-established in the county when he attempted to prevent speakers he considered to be "radical" from addressing the student body at Peary High School, where he was principal. Dunn was unenthusiastic about the lack of respect for authority exhibited by students in the early 1970s, *Washington Post*, "Seminar Barred by Court," May 19, 1971, B1.

<sup>64</sup> *Washington Post*, "Montgomery Schools May Get Added Funds," October 30, 1955, C20.

<sup>65</sup> The Board's policy largely ignored the work of the Committee that had been tasked with providing the Board with a recommendation. The eventual policy was a more aggressive approach than the Committee majority had advocated, though not as aggressive as the minority reports, which advocated complete and total integration in one fell swoop. Ultimately, it seems like the Board split the difference between the majority and minorities of its own committee, but this did not stop the majority from writing an angry letter to the Board demanding an explanation for why its recommendation had been ignored. Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 113-114.

several white elementary schools.<sup>66</sup> The first year, four of the most dilapidated black elementary schools were closed, and the students were placed in 13 formerly all-white schools. Between 1956 and 1960, the remaining black elementary schools were closed, and 47 formerly white elementary schools were desegregated; an additional 42 elementary schools remained all-white.

For the secondary schools, the Board adopted a policy of voluntary transfer that allowed black students to apply for transfer into one of the white secondary schools, pending Board approval.<sup>67</sup> In practice this meant that the Board could handpick the black students who would initially desegregate the secondary schools. This was done to mollify concerns expressed by some white parents that the admission of blacks would negatively affect the educational program; the very best black students were transferred first to show white parents and citizens that desegregation would not ruin their schools. During the first year, 1955-56, the Board desegregated nine of the 18 white secondary schools, although only a handful of black students attended each of these formerly all-white schools.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> It should be noted that the Board largely disregarded the Committee's official recommendation. Whereas the Committee had recommended a phased-in, grade-by-grade policy, the Board opted to close four black elementary schools and move all of those students, across all grades, into white schools in the fall of 1955.

<sup>67</sup> Nina Clarke comments that during the first few years, "only children with the highest academic records were recommended for the white schools." Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 117.

<sup>68</sup> There were eighteen white secondary schools, a figure that included junior high as well as high schools, during the 1955-56 school year; by 1960-61, the final year of desegregation, there were 24 secondary schools. Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space*, 331. In total, in the fall of 1955, 490 black pupils, mostly elementary school students, began the school year at 21 formerly all-white schools; they were joined by six black teachers. Dunn, "Policies and Procedures of Desegregation," 121. See also Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 115. Desegregation of the faculty will be discussed in more detail shortly.

Frederick Dunn visited every white school scheduled for desegregation and orchestrated multiple sessions with school officials and the P-TA of each school so that he or a member of his staff could meet with any white parents who had questions. He also conducted extensive planning sessions with the white teachers and administrators who were on the front lines of this transition. The teachers peppered Dunn with questions: What if a teacher had 5 black students in her classroom and all were performing poorly – would she be accused of discrimination? What if the “accent” of the black pupils makes it difficult for the teacher to understand them, and vice versa? When placing students in reading groups, should there always be at least two blacks per group, to avoid making one feel isolated? Would a reading group that had black and white boys but only one white girl be allowed?<sup>69</sup> Dunn also chaired large open meetings for community members to attend, where parents asked similar questions about how school officials would handle students of different races.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> These hypotheticals, and others, were brought up at a county-wide “Staff Conference on Integration” held on September 1, 1955, just before schools opened. Dunn, “Policies and Procedures of Desegregation,” 77-84.

<sup>70</sup> One of the biggest meetings was held at Wheaton High School in April of 1955, announcing the closing of the four “substandard” black elementary schools. This meeting was attended by “at least 250” people, in part because *Brown II* had not yet been issued and there was still some uncertainty among the public about whether *Brown I* actually overrode the state law requiring segregated systems. The Board was choosing to proceed, anticipating the clarification that *Brown II* would provide, and had to explain its reasoning to the public. Some white parents asked whether black students were more at risk for communicable diseases; others wondered whether inter-racial square dancing at gym class was advisable. School system officials presented health data which noted that *whites* actually had higher incidents of polio, head lice, scarlet fever, and tuberculosis than blacks; health officials also dryly noted that incidents of syphilis and gonorrhea were roughly equal. The dancing issue was left to the individual schools to address on their own, based on principal’s judgment of what his school’s community could accept. Dunn, “Policies and Procedures of Desegregation,” 43, 50, 94, 175.

The official school system response to such inquiries was to try to *ignore race* as much as possible and treat these strictly as *educational problems*.<sup>71</sup> Dunn reminded teachers of their professional training and experience and told them to treat all students the same, as though the difficulties that came up were strictly about scholastic aptitude. The white school system was deemed sufficient to absorb the black students without directly acknowledging any potential difference in upbringing, experience, or learning styles that might have been affected by that child's race.<sup>72</sup> The Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations agreed with the Dunn, advising its membership associations that the best way to avoid racial "problems was to assume there would be none," and to welcome black parents into the organization as parents, not as black people.<sup>73</sup>

Although in one respect this sounded admirably color-blind and reflected the consensus among the down-county white liberals to focus on desegregation as a purely logistical matter, Dunn was caught in some strange contradictions as he addressed white teachers and members of the public. For decades, the black schools had been underfunded, understaffed, and ignored by the MCPS hierarchy, and as a result black students in the county lagged significantly behind their white

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<sup>71</sup> Also, in December, 1955, after the first few months of the first desegregation efforts, a poll of principals reported that nearly all problems which arose were "mainly educational in nature" and had been handled as such. See "Survey of Desegregated Schools, December, 1955", summarized in Dunn, "Policies and Procedures of Desegregation," 84, 167.

<sup>72</sup> The principal at Poolesville, Robert Crawford, reported in a letter to the Superintendent in January 1957, that his school's desegregation had gone smoothly the previous fall in large part because "the procedure has been to treat the desegregated school as if it had always existed. This treatment seems to have worked well to date." Problems, Crawford reported, are treated "individually in a quiet manner with a conscious effort to play down such problems and avoid stirring passions." Letter from Crawford to Norris, January, 1957, quoted in Dunn, "Policies and Procedures of Desegregation," 157.

<sup>73</sup> A letter from Lee Nichols, who was in charge of the MCCPTA's Committee on Desegregation, mentioned this in a letter to member associations. It is reprinted, in part, in Dunn, "Policies and Procedures of Desegregation," 101.

counterparts. According to MCPS's research department, the results of the General Educational Development Tests in 1955, administered at the end of the school year to twelfth graders, indicated that white students achieved well above the national norm while black students were below. White students averaged a 69 in literature and 62 in mathematics, against a national average of 50, while county blacks averaged a 12 in both subjects.<sup>74</sup> Also, on IQ tests white sixth and ninth graders had a median score of 109, while black sixth graders had a median of 86, and black ninth graders had a median of 85.<sup>75</sup> These discrepancies were partially due to unequal educational environments, but it also seems probable that another contributing factor were the racial and economic inequalities that circumscribed the day-to-day opportunities of black people in Montgomery County. Yet even knowing this information, Dunn did his best to ignore these differences and focus his efforts on soothing white concerns about what desegregation would mean for their schools. "It is paramount that our standards don't suffer. That's one of the big reasons for our gradual program," commented Superintendent Forbes Norris.<sup>76</sup> Norris and Dunn prioritized white concerns about the effect that desegregation might have on white children, rather than focus on black concerns about addressing the years of educational inequality that had preceded desegregation.

The stated policy – of dispersing black elementary school students across several white elementary schools and slowly phasing in black secondary school

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<sup>74</sup> Dunn, "Policies and Procedures of Desegregation," 37.

<sup>75</sup> Montgomery County used the California Mental Maturity Test, used to determine intelligence quotients, in the 1950s. Dunn, "Policies and Procedures of Desegregation," 39.

<sup>76</sup> *Washington Post* "County PTAs Air Integration," October 11, 1956, 22.

students based on their ability – was designed specifically to assure white parents that the educational program would not be adversely affected by desegregation. There was, of course, a somewhat jarring dissonance between the Board’s insistence upon downplaying its role in addressing racial attitudes in society and its concerted efforts to address those very attitudes among anxious white parents. Dunn and Norris conceived the entire transition as one where black students were added to the existing white system; at no point did they consider using any of the existing black school buildings, even the newly-constructed junior high and high schools, as sites for a desegregated school.<sup>77</sup> Also, although as official policy the Board stated that all staff hires and transfers would be based on merit and without consideration of race, during the first years of desegregation school officials were hesitant to hire black teachers to work in the desegregated schools.

This hesitation was likely prompted by concerns expressed by white parents, including some of the liberal parents who lived in the down-county area and supposedly supported desegregation. A poll taken among parents and teachers by the MCCPTA in the fall of 1955 noted that nearly all parents in the rural up-county region were against the idea of having black teachers “at this time,” and a majority of the down-county liberals were also hesitant about putting a black teacher in front of a room of white students, suggesting that black teachers should only be placed in

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<sup>77</sup> Carver High School had opened in August of 1950. The building still stands today and serves as home to MCPS Central Offices, and when it opened it was top-of-the line, a large sprawling facility which offered the same four curricula – academic, commercial, general, and vocational – that the white high school offered. It seems significant that the Board never considered using Carver as a desegregated high school; anecdotally, some former Montgomery County teachers and administrators indicated to me that the school was not desegregated because white people thought of it as the “black school” and would not have accepted it as suitable for white students. Oral history interview with David Eberly, 4/24/07, transcript in possession of author. It should be noted that the labyrinthine hallways seemed, to this visitor, deliberately designed to confuse people attempting to find their destination, or at least slow them down. See Hill, *Before Us Lies the Timber*, 85-86.

schools with both black and white students.<sup>78</sup> This was another small but significant indication about the limited scope of the liberal attitude held by these suburbanites. Even as they professed to prefer a school system that operated according to objective and professional standards and policies and employed merit-based hiring protocols, they were still somewhat uncomfortable about the idea of a black teacher teaching their children. Their response to the poll seemed to indicate that they would prefer a white teacher – even a less-qualified teacher with fewer credentials and years of experience – to a black teacher when it came to staffing all-white classrooms.

On the other hand, the local black community was very interested in having the teaching and administrative staffs desegregated as soon as possible. Local activist groups, including the Federation of Parent-Teacher Associations, the local chapter of the NAACP, and others began writing letters<sup>79</sup> to the School Board in July of 1954, a few weeks after *Brown* was announced, calling for “the integration of the administrative, supervisory, and administrative personnel” to begin immediately and concurrent with the integration of pupils. They noted the Board’s stated policy of merit-based hiring and were confident that there were several well-qualified black teachers and administrators.<sup>79</sup> Beyond their credentials, black community leaders wanted to see black teachers and administrators hired because these were positions of power and respect within the school system, and hiring blacks would make sure that black viewpoints would be represented within classrooms and administrative offices. Hiring black teachers and administrators might also affect the way that white children

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<sup>78</sup> The MCCPTA survey is discussed and part of its results are reproduced in Dunn, “Policies and Procedures of Desegregation,” 181-183.

<sup>79</sup> Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 107-108.



and white teachers thought about black people, serving as in-the-flesh examples of intelligence, competence, and authority.

Margaret Jones was an ideal candidate for an upper-level administrative position, and black leaders coordinated their efforts to single her out as an important appointment for the Board to make.<sup>80</sup> Jones had been serving as Supervisor of Black Schools, a position roughly equivalent to an Assistant Superintendent for a geographic area within the county.<sup>81</sup> She had a bachelor's degree from Howard University and had done graduate work in Washington D.C and New York City. After teaching in a one-room schoolhouse in the Scotland neighborhood of Rockville for thirteen years she became principal of Rockville Elementary in 1943, a position she continued to hold even after her appointment as Supervisor of Black Schools in 1951.<sup>82</sup> She was well-respected and admired by both black and white educational leaders, and her decades of experience made her a strong candidate for a position at the MCPS central offices.

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<sup>80</sup> These included petitions by the local NAACP, an organization called the Montgomery Civic Unity Committee, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the newly-desegregated Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations. Also, small local committees, remnants of the trustees of individual black schools, also joined in the call for immediate desegregation of students, teachers, and administrators. Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 107-108.

<sup>81</sup> The position of Supervisor of Black Schools was created in the mid-1910s as part of the MCPS hierarchy. Nominally, this person oversaw the administration of the educational program in the black schools, almost like an assistant superintendent assigned to a particular group of schools. In practice, the local community, through groups like United Trustees, had significantly more influence than the Supervisor, although as the official liaison within the school system, the Supervisor could assist the community leaders in important ways as they tried to work with the Board.

<sup>82</sup> Scotland, in those days, existed as a black community of homes among the pastures; Jones' one-room school in the 1930s had anywhere from 30 to 50 students, many of whom took seasonal work assisting farmers. Rockville was a graded school, and Jones continued to teach grades 6 and 7 even as she served as Principal. Holding two positions, as principal and Supervisor was typical in the black school system; several of the previous Supervisors had also been principals, a double-duty that was not required of white Area Supervisors. See Transcript of Oral History interview with Margaret Jones, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 6-8, also 13-14.

One of the black leaders who petitioned the Board to find an upper-level administrative position for Jones was Alphonzo Lee. Lee was the President of the PTA of Carver Junior High and Lincoln High School, the only junior high and high school for blacks in the county until desegregation. Immediately following the *Brown* decision in 1954 Lee was pleased to see the Board move quickly to develop an Advisory Committee on Integration that included prominent black leaders. Lee sensed that the history of black educational activism in the county could potentially be transformed into a collaborative partnership with white activists to develop the new integrated school system. He was confident that concerns about the educational experience of black children would be addressed by the School Board and high-level administrators, all of whom were white. In addition to participating in the PTA network, Lee served as Executive Secretary of the local chapter of the NAACP.<sup>83</sup>

In the spring of 1955, the Board rejected the requests from black leaders like Lee to give Jones a position high in the administrative hierarchy. Instead, the Board abolished the Supervisor of Black Schools position and returned Jones to serve as a full-time principal at an all-black school.<sup>84</sup> The elimination of Jones' position meant that the remaining black schools would be brought under the authority of white Assistant Superintendents during the transition to a single school system. It also meant that roving instructors for subjects like art, music, or physical education would

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<sup>83</sup> Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 107-109.

<sup>84</sup> Transcript of oral history interview with Margaret Jones, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 14-15. Jones reports that there was considerable outrage in the black community, although, upon reflection, she did not feel terribly slighted because she enjoyed the job of principal more. It's hard to believe Jones' magnanimity, especially since the oral history interview was given in the 1970s, while at the time, she was quoted as saying she "wouldn't like to be a principal again. I am qualified for a supervisor's position," and pointedly used the word "demoted" to refer to her reassignment. Jones quoted in an article in the *Washington Daily News*, "Montgomery Board Split," July 9, 1955, 29, cited in Dunn, "Policies and Procedures of Desegregation," 119.

be folded into the existing white school administrative hierarchy.<sup>85</sup> Lee was surprised and disappointed by the decision, but he remained cautiously hopeful that there might be other ways for blacks to be placed in important positions in the desegregated schools.

Because of the baby boom and the growing school-aged population, the MCPS was hiring more than 200 new teachers each year during the 1950s. Lee sent a letter to the Board in August of 1955 indicating the NAACP's strong preference for some of these positions to go to black candidates.<sup>86</sup> The official Statement of Policy on Integration stated unambiguously that "the integration of Board of Education employees shall be accomplished at the same time as the integration of pupils" and that all appointments "shall be based on relative merit."<sup>87</sup> In the summer of 1954, the Montgomery County Education Association, which had represented the county's white teachers, removed the word "white" from its description of membership requirements and invited black teachers to join.<sup>88</sup> MCEA and the MCCPTA agreed with the Board's official policy that hiring should be based on merit, and given the shortage of teachers it seemed obvious that there would be opportunities for black

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<sup>85</sup> Nina Clarke spells out what the dissolution of Jones' supervisory position actually meant in practice: not only was Jones not made a supervisor of white schools, but the remaining black schools would now be divided up among white supervisors in the administrative hierarchy. Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 108.

<sup>86</sup> Minutes from the Board of Education meeting held on August 29, 1955 reflect the testimony of a Mr. Hines, spokesman for the NAACP Legal Redress Committee. Dunn, "Policies and Procedures of Desegregation," 119.

<sup>87</sup> The original Statement of Policy on Integration and Norris's response to the NAACP, which came in the form of a letter, are reproduced in Dunn, "Policies and Procedures of Desegregation," 120, 49.

<sup>88</sup> MCEA Executive Committee resolution, quoted at length in Dunn, "Policies and Procedures of Desegregation," 46-47.

candidates to be hired in the County.<sup>89</sup> Yet despite the visible presence of Lee and others from the NAACP at Board meetings, when school opened in the fall of 1955 none of the over 200 teaching vacancies had been filled by black candidates. According to the Superintendent, one of the criteria for hiring was that a new teacher should have a “reasonable chance for success” and in staff judgment no black candidate was qualified.<sup>90</sup>

This slight provoked even more anger in the black community than passing over Jones for an administrative position, especially since 12 white teachers without a college degree were hired in addition to over 100 white teachers who had no teaching experience. Alphonzo Lee noted that the NAACP was “concerned over the question of who is to decide whether a candidate has a chance to succeed,” suggesting that the Superintendent or someone on his staff had made the decision unilaterally while disregarding the Board’s official policy.<sup>91</sup> Lee led a group of activists, including PTA members, leaders from several local churches, and representatives from other organizations to a crowded a Board meeting in November and demanded the Board explain how these new and inexperienced white teachers had a more “reasonable chance for success” than the experienced and credentialed black teachers who were

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<sup>89</sup> MCCPTA voiced their opinion in the spring of 1955, see Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 109. MCEA had long advocated using professional credentials, including state certificate, bachelor’s, and master’s degrees as the primary hiring criteria, and their swift move to allow black teachers in the summer of 1954 indicates their belief that black teachers should be afforded the same opportunities as whites, where credentials allowed.

<sup>90</sup> Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 115.

<sup>91</sup> *Washington Post* “Montgomery to Air Negro Hiring Policy,” November 13, 1955, A16. At least one School Board member agreed with Lee, noting that the Superintendent “has not carried out our policy.”

not hired.<sup>92</sup> As school officials stammered their response, Lee angrily pointed out that hiring less qualified white teachers over better-qualified black ones could very well have a detrimental effect on the quality of the educational program for all students. This was a particularly damning indictment that struck at the heart of the contradiction between the white liberal concern for educational excellence and objective hiring procedures and their hesitancy about integration.

The hires were another indication that the Board was prioritizing white concerns about maintaining the status quo over black desires for more representation and equality. During the crucial first few years of desegregation, blacks were asked to bear the brunt of the transition while whites were assured that the addition of black students would not significantly modify their good schools. There were other small indications of this attitude, including the fact that every spring after 1955 the Board identified black schools that were to be closed and sent a letter of explanation to the parent or guardian of every black child.<sup>93</sup> It seems as though this letter, which was sent to black families but not white ones, served to reinforce the notion that blacks were being asked to change their behavior and expectations regarding education to meet those of the already-existing white school system. White principals of the first desegregated elementary schools complained that the new black students did not exhibit proper behaviors: they did not bring in notes explaining an absence, did not

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<sup>92</sup> This Board meeting, held on November 14, 1955, is discussed in Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 116. Ironically, the black activists were joined in the audience at the Board meeting by Everett Severe, a segregationist who spearheaded the protest at Poolesville the following year, and other segregationists who supported the Board's hiring policies by arguing that *Brown* applied to students only. Indeed, Severe and his supporters were questioning why six black teachers had been transferred to white schools at all. In addition to Clarke's account of the meeting, also see Dunn, "Policies and Procedures of Desegregation," 121-122. Also see *Washington Post*, "Montgomery to Air Negro Hiring Policy," November 13, 1955, A16.

<sup>93</sup> Dunn, "Policies and Procedures of Desegregation," 93.

bring in their permission slips for polio shots, and often would not complete their homework. In some cases, these complaints may have revealed real deficiencies in the black students' prior education, but they were voiced in a climate that was predisposed to find fault with the black students and preserve the privilege of whites.<sup>94</sup> The idea that the teachers might need to adapt their pedagogical strategies and adjust their expectations to address the abilities and educational experience of black students was not considered by school administrators.

The pace of desegregation was also geared toward addressing white concerns. Blacks wanted immediate and complete desegregation in the fall of 1955, but by the spring of 1958 only about 1,000 of the county's 3,000 black students were in desegregated schools, mostly at the elementary school level. The "voluntary" transfer of high achieving black students into the secondary schools had been employed to allow the Board to demonstrate to white parents that desegregation would not adversely affect the educational program in the high schools.<sup>95</sup> Meanwhile, leaders in the black community were growing increasingly frustrated at the slow pace of integration. Alphonzo Lee, who had changed job titles from Executive Secretary to President of the local NAACP, decided to try and use the upcoming School Board election to push school officials to move more quickly to desegregate the rest of

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<sup>94</sup> The December, 1955, survey is cited at length in Dunn, "Policies and Procedures of Desegregation," 171-173. Principals also noted that many black students had never seen indoor plumbing before, and spent a lot of time the first few days flushing the toilets. Obviously, the fact that the black students were so lacking in what the white principals considered to be acceptable behavior underscores how unequal the segregated school systems truly were.

<sup>95</sup> For example, black high school students who enrolled at the Poolesville school were high-achievers who seamlessly moved into the school with no disruption or modification of its educational program, according to the principal. *Washington Post* "Montgomery County Superintendent Quotes Md. School Law to Parents," September 6, 1956, 1. Also see Dunn, "Policies and Procedures of Desegregation," 153-155.

Montgomery County's schools. Lee sent a questionnaire to all of the candidates for School Board asking, among other things, if they were in favor of total desegregation in the fall of 1959 and if they favored immediate and total desegregation of the professional staff.

Lee used the responses to his questionnaire to rank the Board candidates according to a sliding scale he defined himself. "The NAACP labeled 'anti-integration' any candidates who stated, merely, that they favored continuation of the present Board policy," he announced. Six of the seventeen candidates fell into that category; another four were categorized as "anti-integration-leaning," and one, Harrison King, was labeled a segregationist. Only five of the candidates were, in Lee's estimation, "pro-integration." Lee's strategy was bold and, perhaps, unfair to the candidates running for the Board. He alone had access to the results of the questionnaire, and his determination of a candidate's position on desegregation was also influenced by other public statements he attributed to each candidate. Many of the candidates that Lee labeled "anti-integration" would likely have objected to that characterization, but such hyperbole is standard fare in the messy world of electoral politics. Lee waited to publish his ratings of candidates until late in October, only a week or so before voters went to the polls, to make sure his endorsements were fresh in the minds of the electorate.<sup>96</sup>

It is hard to be sure what effect the NAACP's recommendations had on the election, but three seats were won by candidates Lee identified as "pro-integration,"

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<sup>96</sup> Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 121-122. In a footnote, Clarke cites the *Montgomery County Sentinel* publishing Lee's ratings on October 23, 1958.

and another seat was won by a “cautiously pro-integration” candidate.<sup>97</sup> There were some other issues that probably affected the 1958 School Board election, including debates over curriculum and pedagogy and the ongoing reorganization prompted by the McKinsey Report. But the NAACP had not previously been involved in School Board elections, and Lee’s blunt use of the bully pulpit to tie the Board candidates to specific positions may have helped voters, most of whom were white down-county liberal suburbanites, identify the candidates whose approach to integration met with the approval of an influential member of the black community. At the very least, Lee and the NAACP had been very visible and active since the announcement of the *Brown* decision, demonstrating that black activists intended to continue their tradition of educational activism. This initial foray into electoral politics focused on the one issue – the desegregation of the schools – that mattered most to Lee and others in the black community in 1958, but in the future other black leaders used local School Board elections as an opportunity to introduce black educational concerns in the ongoing conversation about maintaining the quality public schools in the county.

After the 1958 election, school officials moved more rapidly over the next three years, closing all of the remaining black schools and placed the students in desegregated (formerly white) schools. The governing logic behind placing these students included maintaining small class sizes (23 to 28 pupils per teacher), redrawing boundaries to ensure no more than a 1:3 ratio of black to white students in

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<sup>97</sup> The three remaining seats on the School Board that year went to two candidates about whom Lee had issued a ranking of “undecided” and one incumbent Board member whom Lee classified as in favor of “gradual” integration. This ranking seemed more generous than might have been expected since Lee had declared that support of the Board’s present policy qualified someone for an “anti-integration” rating; Helen Scharf, the incumbent winner, must have indicated to Lee that she was open to something more rapid than the present policy, even if still a “gradual” approach. Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 122; also Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space*, 268.



any given school, and working to make certain that all school plants would have adequate space for libraries, multi-purpose rooms, health rooms, teacher lounges, and conference rooms, to prevent overcrowding. Based on those criteria the last of the all-black schools in Montgomery County shut its doors in the spring of 1961.<sup>98</sup> Even after desegregation was complete, during the 1960-61 school year, 46 out of 116 schools in the county had no black students.<sup>99</sup>

Alphonzo Lee and the NAACP kept putting pressure on school officials to hire more black teachers and principals. Lee argued that there would be “no substantial difficulties” regarding opposition from white parents so long as the Board stood firmly behind the black teachers. In a letter to the School Board, Lee urged the board to assign black teachers to integrated schools and not to be “influenced by the assumed existence of a hostile community sentiment.”<sup>100</sup> He also had not forgotten about the talented Margaret Jones, whom the Board had passed over for an administrative position in 1955. Jones had remained a principal at an all-black school, and Lee pushed the School Board to place her as a principal at a newly integrated school. She had the years of experience and credentials to assuage any doubts from white parents and teachers regarding her competence and ability. Jones and Lee were elated in the summer of 1959 when the School Board decided to make her principal at Bannockburn Elementary School, a school that had opened in 1957 as an integrated school. Bannockburn was located in the heart of the down-county

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<sup>98</sup> Clarke outlines the criteria for the sped-up second phase of desegregation, and notes that in 1960-61 there were a total of 92 elementary schools and 24 secondary schools in the county. Of the 92 elementary schools, 47 had some black students, while 20 of the 24 secondary schools had some black students. Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 123, 125.

<sup>99</sup> Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 125.

<sup>100</sup> Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 123.

suburban area, near Bethesda, and the white liberal parents in the area welcomed her appointment.<sup>101</sup> For Lee, Jones' appointment fulfilled the Board's original policy, stated in 1955, of employing merit-based criteria when it came to hiring and promoting teachers and administrators; indeed, such criteria had been a stated preference of the white middle-class professionals who had worked to reform school administration since the 1940s.

However, the experience of desegregation exposed an uncomfortable tension that existed in the minds of many county residents. Even as desegregation accelerated in 1959, school officials went to great lengths to make sure that the addition of black students to the white schools caused as little disruption as possible to the preexisting educational environment. The 1:3 ratio of black to white students, in particular, which required redrawing several boundaries in the down-county suburban area, demonstrates how school officials were intent upon adding black students to white schools and not vice versa. School officials simply assumed that this would guarantee those black children an equal educational opportunity to the white children whose classrooms they joined. Although more black teachers were gradually added to the professional staff, the curricular offerings and pedagogical strategies stressed in MCPS were not significantly modified to address the possibility that black children had different needs from white ones, or that educating black and white children together might itself transform the educational culture of a classroom.

In some respects the transition from two school systems to a single desegregated system in Montgomery County was smooth and successful. There were

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<sup>101</sup> Transcript of Oral History interview with Margaret Jones, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, p. 19-20. Also see Clarke, *History of the Black Public Schools in Montgomery County*, 124.

only two instances of communities objecting to the desegregation of their schools, and both of these were quickly resolved with minimal controversy.<sup>102</sup> By the fall of 1961 every black student was enrolled in a desegregated school, and school officials considered the matter settled. But disappointment simmered in the black community. Jones' appointment as principal at Bannockburn came five years after *Brown*, and the delay in hiring more black teachers and administrators irritated many blacks. So did the fact that the administration insisted on treating any potential problems as solely educational in nature, refusing to acknowledge the underlying racial and economic inequalities which black children brought with them when they walked through the schoolhouse door.

Alphonzo Lee's persistent lobbying and his potential impact on the 1958 election represented something of a high-water mark for blacks as an organized force in county educational politics. For the next decade, blacks largely disappeared from the educational scene because they comprised an ever-smaller proportion of the

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<sup>102</sup> These two incidents, at Rollingwood Elementary in 1955 and Poolesville School in 1956, are mentioned in a previous footnote. They both generated a fair amount of media coverage, both from the *Washington Post* as well as from local papers like the *Montgomery Journal* and *Montgomery Sentinel*. However, when compared to what happened in other localities, from massive resistance of white mobs to school system officials deliberately dragging out desegregation policymaking, these two flickers of protest in Montgomery County were of little consequence. At Rollingwood, a hastily-formed organization called the Rollingwood Community Association, likely representing a few parents, protested to the state Board that the local Board had moved too quickly; when the state Board rejected this appeal, RCA disbanded and the school was desegregated in the fall of 1955. See, for example, "Rollingwood Negro Pupil Transfer Hit" *Washington Post*, July 26, 1955, 23. The situation at Poolesville was more contentious, as it actually involved protesters (many from out-of-state) on the schoolhouse lawn who urged white students to go home. The activists later protested to the local Board that members of the Poolesville community believed in separation of the races. Despite attracting a bit of attention for a month or so in the fall of 1956, these protesters did not delay the desegregation of the school. Most significantly, these were the only two instances of any kind of organized protest to desegregation in Montgomery County, which seems to indicate that residents were at worst resigned to and at best welcoming of the transition.

county's total population.<sup>103</sup> During the 1960s, the county was only around three percent black, and concerns about educational equality for black children were not acknowledged by school officials nor by the white majority in any significant way. Educational politics focused on curricular issues, the growing educational bureaucracy, and teacher professionalism. Black activists teamed with some white liberals to target the County Council as they focused their activism on the county's housing and accommodations policies that perpetuated unequal treatment of black people. In 1968 and 1969, the Montgomery County Council passed a fair housing and an open accommodations act, and these initiated a rapid influx of African-Americans into Montgomery County's down-county suburban area.<sup>104</sup> Buoyed by these larger numbers, during the 1970s blacks quickly reestablished themselves as group of citizens with specific educational concerns, and they demanded that school officials address the black experience in the public schools, as will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Although blacks did not reemerge as a significant force in county educational politics until the 1970s, the history of black activism during the segregation era and the first years of desegregation demonstrated a longstanding concern about education. The white liberal majority in the county remained dominant in the 1950s, but their

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<sup>103</sup> Lee and other black leaders turned their attention to the county's restrictive housing and accommodations policies, arguing that such policies made the county's government an "enforcer of racism" when, for example, a black man could be arrested after trying to buy a cup of coffee and refusing to leave when the staff at Stanley's Diner in Rockville denied him service. *Washington Post*, "NAACP Says Policy Makes Montgomery 'Enforcer of Racism,'" April 13, 1961, C23.

<sup>104</sup> The county had had a Human Relations Commission since 1962, but this office did not really develop as a full-blown agency until the passage of these two laws necessitated that county government have a system to cope with allegations of discrimination. The HRC worked to make sure that the two new laws were followed by local businesses, landlords, and realtors. See MCA, RG13: Office of Public Information, Box 3, Tape 94 "Human Relations Commission," 8/5/71.

years of exerting exclusive influence on the trajectory of the school system were drawing to a close. Black residents were the first to join the white liberals by attending public hearings and participating in School Board elections, and the black activists had a particular educational vision that focused on the educational needs of black children that clashed with the color-blind educational philosophy of the white liberals. The process of desegregation angered many blacks; from their perspective, the school system response was unsatisfactory. It was also unacceptable that the educational program had not been modified to address the years of inferior education endured by blacks, and that school officials seemed determined not to acknowledge how the social and cultural inequalities that divided black and white people outside of school could be endorsed and perpetuated inside the classrooms. The black educational vision differed from that of the white liberals, and the system the liberals had constructed fell short of optimal in the eyes of many blacks. An initial crack had emerged in the consensus regarding Montgomery County's good schools. As the 1960s began, conservative activists and organized teachers were poised to assert their own educational visions and initiate a more competitive era in county electoral politics.

### **Chapter 3**

## **From the Right and the Left: Conservative Activists and Organized Teachers Challenge the Liberal Consensus**

In the 1940s, Montgomery County began a transition away from a local political scene dominated by the state Democratic Party toward a new political era characterized by grassroots democratic pluralism. Until 1962, the largest, most well-organized, and dedicated activist group involved in educational politics was the countywide coalition of Parent-Teacher Associations dominated by liberals whose members successfully implemented their progressive vision of quality public schools.<sup>1</sup> During desegregation African Americans, who had a long history of educational activism in Montgomery County, became the first vocal and active group to organize and challenge the dominant white liberal majority who effectively controlled the school system.<sup>2</sup> In 1962 a committed group of conservative activists, relying on both economically conservative arguments about taxation and the size of government as well as educationally conservative arguments about the importance of the fundamentals surprised many local political observers by engineering a takeover

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<sup>1</sup> These white liberals were, for the most part, professionals. According to the US Census, by 1960 27.3 % of the employed population in Montgomery County was “professional, technical, and related,” while an additional 14.1 % identified themselves as “managers, officers, and proprietors,” and another 19.5% worked in “clerical or related” occupations. Sixty percent of the population worked in some kind of white-collar profession, while another 9% worked in sales. Montgomery County Archives (MCA), Board of Education (BOE) Printed Materials, “Financing Public Education in Montgomery County, 1965-1970,” February 1964, Appendix A, Table 2.

<sup>2</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, by the early 1960s the black population in Montgomery County had dwindled to about 3% of the total population because restrictive covenants and other policies prohibited blacks from moving into the county even as white middle class families moved in by the thousands.

of a majority of seats on the School Board.<sup>3</sup> The 1962 election marked a turning point in the county's educational politics and the beginning of a more competitive era.

After the stunning results in 1962 another group of county residents quickly became more involved in educational politics: the county's teachers. The Montgomery County Education Association (MCEA), the professional association that represented teachers, had refrained from public activism for decades but in 1963 some members of MCEA formed a spin-off organization, the Committee for Public Schools (CPS), with the express purpose of participating in the 1964 and 1966 School Board elections. These activist teachers proved effective at mobilizing teachers and other sympathetic residents, and the CPS quickly became a powerful organization dedicated to electoral politics. The MCEA remained in the background politically but sought to secure more power and influence for teachers by establishing legally-binding professional negotiations with the School Board to determine the salary schedule and working conditions.

A small group of teachers complicated matters by arguing that neither the CPS nor the MCEA were sufficiently radical in their approaches. These more militant teachers formed a Classroom Teachers Association and, a year later, became an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers. The Montgomery County Federation of Teachers saw teachers as workers struggling with school administrators

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<sup>3</sup> This election is the focus of an academic study conducted by Keith Goldhammer and Frank Farner for the Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration (CASEA) at the University of Oregon. Goldhammer and Farner employ pseudonyms, referring to Montgomery as "Jackson" County and assigning School Board candidates and other individuals pseudonyms that often share a common first letter with their real-life counterpart. *The Jackson County Story* and its follow-up volume, *Jackson County Revisited* are referenced in this chapter and the next. Keith Goldhammer and Frank Farner *The Jackson County Story* (Eugene, OR: Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration, 1964); Keith Goldhammer and Ronald J. Pellegrin, *Jackson County Revisited* (Eugene, OR: University of Oregon Press, 1968).

for higher pay, better working conditions, and individual rights. MCFT members believed the MCEA was too conciliatory with school officials because the association welcomed administrators as members.<sup>4</sup> The difference between the MCEA and the MCFT was more than nominal; it reflected a fundamental philosophical split among the ranks of the county's teachers. Although the MCFT struggled to attract members, its small but dedicated leadership worked hard to insert their more radical class-based articulation of teacher rights into the ongoing discussion about maintaining the county's public schools.

The mid-1960s were a moment when the liberal vision that dominated educational politics in Montgomery County was challenged from both the right and the left. The conservative activism in 1962 was similar to the grassroots conservatism that was gaining traction in suburban communities across the country, particularly in Sunbelt states. The conservatives in Montgomery developed a layered message that appealed to the self-interest of citizens who resented high taxes to pay for services like schools but also appealed to each voter's sense of community concern by articulating how conservative educational prescriptions were for the greater good. Conservatives in other suburban areas also found success linking straightforward economic appeals of lower taxes to community-oriented ideas like the compassionate

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<sup>4</sup> This was common for NEA locals at the time. According to Marjorie Murphy, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the NEA and the AFT codified their distinct positions on teacher organizations. AFT locals considered themselves to be trade unions and saw teachers as workers and administrators as management. NEA locals considered themselves to be professional associations and perceived teachers and administrators to be allies in a common pursuit of quality education. The AFT had more success in cities, while the NEA established itself in the small towns that bordered cities and later became suburbs. It was not until the 1970s and 1980s that the teachers in NEA locals began separating themselves from the administrators. In Montgomery County, the MCEA ejected principals and other administrators in the early 1980s. Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900-1980* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 2. For more on the early history of MCEA, see Richard Dumais, "A Historical Study of the Establishment and Development of the Montgomery County Education Association (MCEA), Montgomery County, MD, 1867-1961" (Doctoral dissertation, The George Washington University, 1972).



message of Christianity or the prudence of a strong common defense. The conservatives in Montgomery County criticized the public school system while simultaneously arguing that their prescriptions would improve that same public school system; they were not opposed to governmental services like schools but instead believed that they could make those schools *better*. The story of how they won a majority of School Board seats in a county that had a proud progressive and liberal educational tradition sheds some light on how conservatives elsewhere managed to criticize active government while seeking to run public institutions.<sup>5</sup>

The activism of organized teachers in the mid-1960s was not confined to Montgomery County. Across the country teacher unions sought collective bargaining rights, higher salaries, and better working conditions from school administrators. Part of this wave of activism reflected the strength of a labor movement that had ushered thousands of blue-collar Americans into the middle class during the previous decades. President Kennedy's Executive Order in 1962 authorizing federal public employees to unionize was an encouraging signal to public school teachers to flex their

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<sup>5</sup> In recent years scholars have documented the origins of the modern conservative movement and noted the success grassroots organizers had in suburban areas. These local organizers were joined by wealthy benefactors, some public intellectuals like William Buckley, and some national politicians like Barry Goldwater to form a burgeoning conservative coalition in the early 1960s. Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Richard White, "It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own:" *A New History of the American West* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Jerome Himmelstine, *To the Right: The Transformation of American Conservatism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); William Rusher, *The Rise of the Right* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1984); Matthew D. Lassiter, *Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Sidney Blumenthal, *The Rise of the Counter-Establishment* (New York, Harper & Row, 1988); Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution* (New York: Free Press, 1999); Godfrey Hodgson, *The World Turned Right Side Up: A History of the Conservative Ascendancy in America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996); Jean Sefancic and Richard Delgado, *No Mercy: How Conservative Think Tanks and Foundations Changed America's Social Agenda* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1996).

organized muscle. The changing nature of the educational workforce was also important. Montgomery County, like many other suburban school districts, hired thousands of new teachers during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s in response to the baby boom, and these teachers tended to be younger and better-educated than in the past. There were more men, as well, who saw teaching as a respectable profession, on par with doctors, lawyers, scientists, and other middle-class occupations. Rising teacher militancy in the United States simultaneously contained elements of working-class unionism as well as middle-class notions of professionalism; in urban areas perhaps more of the former and in suburban areas perhaps more of the latter, but always a combination of the two.<sup>6</sup>

Teachers in Montgomery sought more control and decision-making input at their workplace – the public schools – and a seat at the bargaining table where their salaries and other working conditions were determined. Like the conservatives, who carefully articulated an educational vision that included a streamlined bureaucracy

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<sup>6</sup> Marjorie Murphy has written the best history of teacher unions at the national level, while Wayne Urban's history identifies how the complex relationship between the national, state, and national unions have changed over time. There are a few other scholarly appreciations of teacher unions and their activism, notably Jerald Podair's discussion of Albert Shanker and the teacher strike in New York City in 1968. Other than scholarly works, most appreciations of teacher unions tend to be written either by sympathetic writers (often former or current members of teacher unions) or by conservatives predisposed to find fault with unions. Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The NEA and the AFT, 1900-1980* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); Wayne J Urban, *Why Teachers Organized* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1982); Wayne J Urban, *Gender, Race, and the National Education Association* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2000); Jerald Podair, *The Strike that Changed New York; Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Maurice Berube, *Teacher Politics: The Influence of Unions* (Westwood, CT: Greenwood, 1988); Peter Brimelow, *The Worm in the Apple: How Teacher Unions are Destroying American Education* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003); Don Cameron, *The Inside Story of the Teacher Strikes in America* (Lanham, MD: ScarecrowEducation, 2005); Steve Golin, *The Newark Teacher Strikes* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Henry C Johnson, ed. *Merit, Money, and Teacher's Careers* (New York: University Press of America, 1985); Charles Taylor Kercher, Julia E. Koppich and Joseph G. Weeres, *United Mind Workers* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997); G. Gregory Moo, *Power Grab: How the National Education Association is Failing our Children* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1999); David Selden, *The Teacher Rebellion* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1985); James Sullivan, "The Florida Teacher Walkout in the Political Transition of 1968" in *Southern Labor in Transition, 1940-1995* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997).

and more traditional instruction in the Three R's, the teachers had their own educational vision that linked teacher professionalism with overall educational excellence. Teachers saw themselves as trained experts in the field of teaching and learning, and believed that their compensation and working conditions reflected the degree to which their expertise was respected by the administration and the public. The teachers believed that increased salaries and autonomy in the classroom would allow the school system to attract and keep the best young teachers, and this would result in a superior school system for everyone. This vision of good schools proved challenging to articulate to the public, including some of the teachers' longtime allies, the liberal educational activists, some of whom began to wonder if teachers were more interested in material gains for themselves than in what was best for the public school system.

Increased participation by conservatives and teachers further complicated the politics surrounding public education in Montgomery County. Edwin Broome's Dewey-influenced progressive educational program attracted the liberals who seized control of the system, and the methods of political activism pioneered by the liberals served as a blueprint for other interested groups of people to exert influence. The two primary ways that the liberals wielded control were endorsing candidates for School Board and participating at public hearings to lobby school officials. When the liberals were the hegemonic interest group in the county, these two avenues worked neatly together: the Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations (MCCPTA) endorsed candidates for School Board who usually prevailed and responded to MCCPTA suggestions at public forums. But when conservatives and

teachers joined the public discussion about education, by articulating their own distinct educational visions during School Board elections and at public hearings, they cast doubt on the quality of the school system the liberals had worked to maintain.

During the post-WWII decades most of Montgomery County's conservatives were longtime county residents who lived in the rural up-county area. The county's population grew from 49,206 in 1930 to 340,928 in 1960 with the overwhelming majority of the increase concentrated in the down-county suburbs.<sup>7</sup> Since the end of the war and the start of the baby boom public school enrollment increased by about five thousand students annually, from 17,372 students in 1946 to 86,494 in 1961.<sup>8</sup> School construction coincided apace as the county added an average of 228 new classrooms – either in new schools or additions to existing buildings – every year.<sup>9</sup> The MCPS also hired thousands of new teachers and administrators; by 1962 the county employed 4,120 teachers and principals, up from 646 in 1946.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> MCA, BOE Printed Materials, "Financing Public Education in Montgomery County," February, 1964, Table 1, 4. As noted in Chapter 2, black families were prohibited from moving to Montgomery County because of restrictive covenants and other forms of sanctioned racism, including unofficial prohibitions on selling or renting property to black people that were widely understood, so this influx of people was almost entirely white.

<sup>8</sup> MCA, BOE Printed Materials, "Financing Public Education in Montgomery County," February, 1964, Table 2, 5. During this time period, private school enrollment grew at about the same rate. About 19 percent of the county's students were enrolled in private schools.

<sup>9</sup> MCA, BOE Printed Materials, "Financing Public Education in Montgomery County," February 1964, 9. By 1960, the county operated in the 118 schools, up from 66 in 1940. Also see "A Lay Citizens Report on Curriculum" Final Report, Volume 1, August 1961, 17. McKelden Library, University of Maryland, College Park. Also see MCA, County Council Printed Materials, Annual Reports, Annual Report 1963, 68.

<sup>10</sup> MCA, BOE Printed Materials, "Financing Public Education in Montgomery County," February, 1964, Appendix C, Table 2, 83.

The cost of this growth was somewhat absorbed by the broadening tax base but local officials still had to raise taxes to keep up with the unprecedented expansion.<sup>11</sup> The Montgomery County Council increased the property tax rate almost every year, raising it from \$1.09 per \$100 of assessed value in 1947 to \$2.19 per \$100 in 1960.<sup>12</sup> Conservative up-county residents were unhappy about these increases in the property tax to pay for school construction and a rapidly-expanding educational workforce that primarily served the down-county area. To them it seemed as though they were being asked to pay ever-increasing premiums for services that they did not want or need. Although the new arrivals in the suburbs tended to be liberals who supported minor tax increases in exchange for quality public services, some suburbanites, including developers, local businesspeople, and some federal employees agreed with up-county grumbling about the ever-increasing tax rate.

These conservative economic attitudes were accompanied by a similar conservatism regarding the curricular and pedagogical offerings within the schools. Many up-county residents were farmers with less formal education than the professionals who had moved into the down-county area, and they preferred straightforward education in “the basics” to newfangled progressive educational ideas. Even though the county had a tradition of progressive education that dated back to the years when Superintendent Edwin Broome ran the schools, there had always been a solid minority who believed schools should stress the fundamentals and not waste time or resources deploying questionable methods and practices to try

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<sup>11</sup> MCA, BOE Printed Materials, “Financing Public Education in Montgomery County,” February 1964, Table 8, 12.

<sup>12</sup> MCA, BOE Printed Materials, “Financing Public Education in Montgomery County,” February 1964, Table 10, 14.

and reach loftier goals. Economic and educational conservatism were most explicitly linked by concerns about cost-effectiveness: conservatives in both the rural and suburban areas believed progressive educational practices, which often included experimentation and trial runs of new programs, wasted money in the pursuit of nebulous objectives like critical thinking.

The division between progressive and traditional educational philosophies was not unique to Montgomery County. During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, John Dewey argued that a progressive educational program was necessary in a democratic republic like the United States so young citizens could be taught to solve problems and function as a responsible member of the polity. At the same time, Edward Thorndike preferred rote instruction in traditional subjects as a way to help newly-arrived immigrants assimilate and to provide every child with a standard foundation in the basics.<sup>13</sup> Edwin Broome preferred Dewey's approach and pointed the MCPS in that direction during his tenure as Superintendent, and the liberals who began moving to Montgomery County during the 1930s and 1940s agreed with this progressive vision.<sup>14</sup> The liberal activists supported innovation and experimentation and believed that their public schools could continually improve as new developments in curriculum design and pedagogical approaches emerged.

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<sup>13</sup> Emily Robertson, "Is Dewey's Education Vision Still Viable?" in *Review of Research in Education 18*, Gerald Grant, ed. (Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association, 1992); Herbert Kliebard, "What Happened to American Schooling in the First Part of the Twentieth Century?" in *Learning and Teaching the Ways of Knowing: The 84<sup>th</sup> Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* Eliot Eisner, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Larry Cuban, *How Teachers Taught: Constancy and Change in American Classrooms, 1890-1990* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993); Joseph Watras, *Philosophic Conflicts in American Education, 1893-2000* (Boston: Pearson, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> In this respect, the liberal educational activists agreed with Edwin Broome, the Superintendent whose leadership the activists worked to replace. See Chapter One of this dissertation.

By the early 1960s the liberals had brought the school system to align with their ideal. According to a Citizen's Curriculum Study Committee's report, what had been a "rural community whose public schools were merely the minimum standard for public education" had been transformed because of the "dedicated leadership and the improvement of educational planning" during the 1950s. Thanks to the activism of liberal groups like the MCCPTA, the county had "a more favorable climate for improvement" in education, and the county now boasted an "unusually high median family income, . . . one of the highest educational and cultural levels, and is one of the most highly developed suburban counties."<sup>15</sup> School officials and members of the lay committee were committed to continuing the progressive trajectory of the MCPS.<sup>16</sup>

The Committee's report indicated that "the primary reason for the existence of our PUBLIC school system is to contribute to the development of good citizens," a sentiment that hewed closely to Dewey's vision of public schools preparing young people for participation in a dynamic democratic republic.<sup>17</sup> The Report's authors argued that "our schools play a major role in improving quality of living and in the perpetuation of our democracy," and noted that while instruction of facts and skills

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<sup>15</sup> "A Lay Citizens Report on Curriculum" Final Report, Volume 1, August 1961, 23, also 8. McKeldin Library, University of Maryland, College Park. The lay committee itself probably was comprised of people who were members of, or at least were acquaintances of, members of the MCCPTA. According to the committee's Report, there were "numerous requests" from local P-TAs to speak with members of the committee and get updates on how the study was going, and P-TA presidents were provided with frequent draft reports.

<sup>16</sup> The Committee oversaw sixteen Study Groups, many of which focused on the progressive educational model the MCCPTA had worked to develop. In addition to traditional subjects like English and mathematics, there was a Study Group for New Ideas, Experimentation, and Research; a Study Group for New Studies for the Future; and three separate Study Groups focusing on aspects of new curriculum development. "A Lay Citizens Report on Curriculum" Final Report, Volume 1, August 1961, 11-14. McKeldin Library, University of Maryland, College Park.

<sup>17</sup> "A Lay Citizens Report on Curriculum" Final Report, Volume 1, August 1961, p.22 McKeldin Library, University of Maryland, College Park.

was important, the school system in Montgomery County was primarily geared around “training the individual to think, to reason, to understand – rather than merely to impart a body of factual knowledge or group of specific skills.”<sup>18</sup>

Teachers agreed with the lay committee and the liberals in the MCCPTA in supporting an educational program that extended beyond mere instruction in the Three R’s. They believed that it was crucial to cultivate in students “appreciation for and power in logical, critical, and creative thinking” in order to promote “recognition of and respect for the worth of each individual.”<sup>19</sup> The teachers also preferred progressive pedagogical techniques because they gave teachers more room to innovate and develop their own personal style in the classroom. Rote recitation was as unappealing to teachers as it was to students, and the MCEA was populated by young and ambitious teachers eager to be creative and inventive. These teachers found common cause with the parent-led MCCPTA when it came to maintaining a progressive educational philosophy in the public schools.

During the 1950s the liberal suburbanites demonstrated their willingness to work to achieve their educational vision as well as a willingness to pay for it through tax increases when necessary. Their activism included influencing the School Board

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<sup>18</sup> “A Lay Citizens Report on Curriculum” Final Report, Volume 1, August 1961, p. 23-24 McKeldin Library, University of Maryland, College Park.

<sup>19</sup> In 1959, MCPS held a conference titled “Quality Education in Montgomery County – What we Have, What we Need, How do we Obtain it?” At this conference, the results of the survey of the faculty from every school in the county were presented and codified in a declaration of goals and intentions. This statement mentioned the importance of “competence in fundamental skills” but spent much more time discussing the broader goals of education. MCA, BOE Printed Materials, “Quality Education in Montgomery County,” April 24-25, 1959, 4-8.



elections that were held every two years.<sup>20</sup> The MCCPTA wielded considerable clout in School Board elections during the 1950s without engaging in direct campaigning or electioneering because the charter of the national organization of Parent-Teacher Associations explicitly forbid political involvement beyond endorsing candidates, and the local P-TAs followed this policy. Candidates for the Board endorsed by the MCCPTA enjoyed significant success during the 1950s, and by and large the progressive educational vision endorsed by the MCCPTA was made into policy by the people elected to the county's School Board, some of whom were former members of the MCCPTA.<sup>21</sup>

The liberals understood that their preferred educational initiatives cost money, a cost they were willing to bear. By the mid-1950s, the MCCPTA represented a total of 31,626 members from 85 local PTAs who proudly identified themselves as county

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<sup>20</sup> After the elected School Board was established by voter referendum in 1951, there was a brief transition period when incumbent members were replaced by elected members in 1952 and 1954.

<sup>21</sup> Guy Jewell, in *From One Room to Open Space*, chronicles the first few years of School Board elections, culminating in the influential 1962 campaign. His narrative does not explicitly mention every candidate that the MCCPTA endorsed, but he does give descriptions of the educational and political leanings of the winning candidates, nearly all of whom seem to map closely onto that expressed by the MCCPTA. Jewell does note that the MCCPTA was a strong force in educational politics during this time. Guy Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space: A History of Montgomery County Public Schools From 1732 to 1965* (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Public Schools, 1976), 261-274. Also, *The Jackson County Story* notes that "it was generally felt in the county that the School Board was entirely in the hands of the 'liberals,'" and although this might not have been entirely true, the perception was an important weapon for the conservative activists to deploy during the 1962 election. Goldhammer and Farner, *The Jackson County Story*, 33. A good example of a former MCCPTA member who became an elected official is Lathrop Smith, who served both on the County Council and then on the School Board in the 1950s. Smith attended Cornell for two years before transferring to Georgetown, where he earned his bachelor's degree. He moved to Montgomery County in 1935 and immediately became active in local politics. He supported the push for the County Charter and removal of the Lee machine in the 1940s, and was particularly interested in development issues like paving roads, establishing standards for construction, and planning for future growth. He was a strong supporter of the liberal activist agenda for the schools, believing that the most important thing was "better schools. Even if we have to spend money, we want to strengthen our educational system," he said in an oral history interview years later. The willingness to spend money and the push for continued improvement beyond simple instruction in "the basics" was typical among the liberal activists in groups like the MCCPTA. Transcript of oral history interview with Lathrop Smith, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 4, 26.

taxpayers whose children filled the public schools.<sup>22</sup> In the spring of 1955 the County Manager and County Council were considering a \$4 million cut to the School Board's proposed budget for FY 1956, and the MCCPTA led the charge to fight these cuts. They orchestrated a coordinated campaign of more than 400 letters mailed to the County Manager and led a crowd of around 1,500 people to a public hearing to argue against any cuts.<sup>23</sup> The liberal activists, armed with detailed research, specified why spending increases were necessary: 285 teachers had to be hired to teach the more than 5,000 new pupils who would enroll in the fall. Other proposed cuts were addressed one by one: cutting the number of clerks would waste the time of professionally-trained teachers and principals; cutting the number of custodians would allow deterioration of the school buildings; cutting the number of new teachers hired would increase class sizes.<sup>24</sup>

Notably, many of the cuts that the MCCPTA fought concerned teachers, including new teacher hires to keep class sizes small and clerk hires to relieve teachers of some of their paperwork duties as well as responsibilities like hallway or cafeteria monitoring. Because the MCCPTA took the lead in addressing these issues, the MCEA was not very active during the 1950s. MCEA representatives occasionally attended budget hearings and other meetings mostly to second the arguments made by

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<sup>22</sup> MCCPTA handout: "Education is a Sound and Necessary Investment in the Future Well-being of Our Nation and it's (*sic*) Citizens", MCA, RG 18, MCCF, Series III: Committees, Box 2, Folder: Schools 1955-1980, 1. Also see *Washington Post* "\$14 million School Budget Indorsed in Montgomery" April 2, 1955, 24.

<sup>23</sup> *Washington Post* "\$14 million School Budget Indorsed in Montgomery" April 2, 1955, 24; *Washington Post* "School Budget Row Meeting Set Tonight," June 9, 1955, 17; *Washington Post* "1500 Jam Hearing On School Cuts," June 11, 1955, 1. Also see Leslie Abbe oral history, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 1, 7.

<sup>24</sup> "Education is a Sound and Necessary Investment in the Future Well-being of Our Nation and it's (*sic*) Citizens", MCA, RG 18, MCCF, Series III: Committees, Box 2, Folder: Schools 1955-1980, 8-14.

the MCCPTA, whose members took the lead in protesting cuts and promoting their progressive educational vision.

MCCPTA's persistence during the annual budget battles succeeded in, at the very least, reducing the size of the cuts, and modest tax increases were common during the 1950s.<sup>25</sup> In 1956, the liberals argued that "the PTA Council explicitly recognizes that schools needed for the children of Montgomery County will cost money and that providing them will inevitably equal an increase in tax rates. The PTA Council believes that such expenditures are a sound investment and further declares its belief that the great majority of its members are willing to bear the necessary taxes."<sup>26</sup> In 1958, the MCCPTA petitioned both the School Board and County Council for a slight increase in taxes to prevent cuts to the schools budget by arguing that the tax increase was equivalent to a six-pack of beer a week. In a coordinated campaign, numerous people testified at public meetings, all citing the beer example to demonstrate the trivial amount that taxes would be increased.<sup>27</sup>

In the spring of 1962, the County Council approved a .38 cent increase in the property tax rate for the following fiscal year, raising the rate from 2.21 to 2.59 per

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<sup>25</sup> In 1956, when the Council reduced the size of planned cuts but failed to restore the entire School Board budget, the disappointed leadership of the MCCPTA considered sponsoring an amendment to the county Charter that would make it easier for a simple majority of Council members to approve the schools budget. In other words, the MCCPTA considered itself strong enough a player in county politics that a Charter amendment was within the range of its viable alternatives to achieve its goals. Memorandum from Paul Howard, President of MCCPTA, to presidents of local PTAs. MCA, RG 1: County Manager, Series I: Subject Files, Box 2, Folder: Board of Education, July 23, 1956, 1.

<sup>26</sup> See resolution adopted by the MCCPTA. MCA, RG 18, MCCF, Box 2, Series III: Committees, Folder: Schools, May 22, 1956, 1. Also see *Washington Post*, "Teacher Raise Action Delayed," March 25, 1956, B9; *Washington Post*, "Tax Rise Urged to Aid Schools," March 29, 1957, B13.

<sup>27</sup> *Washington Post* "County Citizens Urge Teacher Pay Raises" January 18, 1958, A1. Also see *Washington Post* "Tax Rate Increase Receives Support," April 5, 1960.

\$100 of assessed valuation.<sup>28</sup> This was a significantly larger increase than in previous years and it became a central issue during the campaign for School Board that summer and fall.<sup>29</sup> Most of this tax hike was to pay for an across-the-board increase in teacher salaries proposed by the Superintendent, C. Taylor Whittier, who had been hired in 1957.<sup>30</sup> Whittier was an ambitious young administrator with a doctorate from the University of Chicago and a reputation of both being progressive in his educational philosophy and well-equipped to handle the managerial problems of a large school system.<sup>31</sup> He wanted to increase teacher pay to attract the best teachers to Montgomery. He also encouraged innovation and experimentation in the classroom and gave teachers leeway to implement curricular innovations of their creation. System-wide pedagogical reforms like increased use of expert resource teachers and experimentation with educational trends like the “New Math” as well as

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<sup>28</sup> Figures cited in “Financing Public Education in Montgomery County, 1965-1970.” MCA, BOE Printed Materials, Table 10, 14. One recount of the 1962 election refers to an increase of “approximately .37 cents.” Goldhammer and Farner, *The Jackson County Story*, 32. I’m not sure whether the *Jackson County* authors rounded down or the Tax Study Committee who authored the “Financing Public Education” document rounded up, but I’m inclined to go with the numbers cited by the Tax Study Committee.

<sup>29</sup> For example, during the 1950s the rate was usually only raised a maximum of around .10 cents a year, and between 1959 and 1962 the rate had been raised only .02 cents total. The property tax was the single largest way for the County Council to raise money. In 1962-63, for example, 73% of county revenues came from real estate and personal property taxes, with another 13% coming from state taxes. MCA, County Council Printed Materials, Annual Reports, Annual Report 1963, 10.

<sup>30</sup> After Edwin Broome’s retirement in 1953, Forbes Norris had served as Superintendent for one four-year term and been unceremoniously ousted by a Board which chose not to renew his contract. This caused a minor controversy, as the citizenry was not expecting Norris to be given such a short tenure. According to Lathrop Smith, who served on the School Board that opted not to retain Norris, the Superintendent was a good man who was in over his head, inadequate to the task at hand. Transcript of oral history interview with Lathrop Smith, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 4, 31-33. Smith would actually go so far as answer “yes” when a newspaper reporter asked him point-blank if Norris was incompetent. Complaints about Norris are also articulated in Goldhammer and Farner, *The Jackson County Story*, 13.

<sup>31</sup> Longtime school system administrator Guy Jewell described Whittier as an ambitious go-getter with a get-things-done attitude. Transcript of Oral History interview with Guy Jewell, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 56. Whittier’s reputation is outlined in Goldhammer and Farner, *The Jackson County Story*, 14.

“open space” elementary schools were other ways that Whittier embraced the progressive educational model.<sup>32</sup>

The MCCPTA strongly supported Whittier, and initially, so did the MCEA. But in 1958 the School Board, over MCEA’s objections, initiated a test program called the Career Recognition Program.<sup>33</sup> The goal of this program was to “reward outstanding teachers with annual increases significantly above the automatic pay scale,” according to Superintendent Whittier.<sup>34</sup> Although participation in the program was voluntary and it was only instituted on a trial basis, MCEA leadership looked at the program with suspicion. MCEA Executive Secretary Arthur Simonds complained that it was “well nigh impossible to find an objective basis for evaluating teacher competency.”<sup>35</sup> Simonds and the teachers he represented worried that “merit pay” schemes like this could be a form of cover for principals and administrators to reward their favorite, or punish their least favorite, teachers. Whittier ignored Simonds’ objections and went ahead with the program, causing some teachers to voice their disapproval of the Superintendent.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Whittier’s main reform attempts are discussed in Goldhammer and Farnar, *The Jackson County Story*, 20-24.

<sup>33</sup> *Washington Post*, “Incentive Pay Program Approved for Montgomery County Teachers,” January 26, 1960, B1. Also see, *From One Room to Open Space*, 304, which cites August 24, 1959 as the official adoption of the career recognition program, replete with a “lengthy manual” describing its parameters.

<sup>34</sup> C. Taylor Whittier, *Seven Challenging Years* (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Public Schools, 1964) 16-17.

<sup>35</sup> MCEA’s criticisms of the Career Recognition Program were detailed in the *Washington Post* “145 Merit Raises Urged in County Teacher Plan,” September 12, 1961, A13. Also see *Washington Post*, “Montgomery Teachers Praise Board Ruling,” January 22, 1964, B2.

<sup>36</sup> For a discussion of the Career Recognition Program, see Goldhammer and Farnar, *The Jackson County Story*, 26-28. Also see Whittier, *Seven Challenging Years* 16-17. Also, in his oral history Guy Jewell discusses how Whittier didn’t do enough to try and “sell” the program to teachers,

Arthur Simonds led an organization undergoing rapid changes in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Although the MCEA had represented teachers since 1867, prior to the 1960s it had been not much more than a “tea club.”<sup>37</sup> Teachers new to the county were encouraged to join MCEA by their principals and most teachers signed up without giving the matter much thought.<sup>38</sup> Principals dominated the leadership of the MCEA, and the organization stressed to its members that it was a professional association, as opposed to a trade union.<sup>39</sup> Many teachers in MCEA saw themselves as partners with administrators, colleagues in an ongoing effort to provide the best possible education for the county’s children. But as the school system began to grow

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and instead just kind of forced it upon them. Transcript of Oral History interview with Guy Jewell, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 57.

<sup>37</sup> David Eberly, who served two terms as MCEA President – once in 1968-69 and a second in the early 1980s – used the phrase “tea club” to describe the docile and unremarkable MCEA. Oral history interview with David Eberly, 4/24/07, transcript in possession of author.

<sup>38</sup> David Eberly recalled that when he was a new teacher, his principal approached him and told him about a group called MCEA, and noted that “around here, everyone joins.” Eberly signed up on the spot. Oral history interview with David Eberly, 4/24/07, transcript in possession of author. Also, in June of 1967, an internal MCEA report noted that membership had dropped from the “normal” level of 90% of the teachers in the County down to 78%. Such high numbers seem to indicate that most teachers were signing up as a perfunctory measure. See Report to the Delegate Assembly, June 15, 1967, MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 4. The MCEA Archives are used in this chapter and especially in Chapter Four, discussing the 1968 Teacher Strike. MCEA does not officially maintain an archive that is available to researchers. However, in 1974 John F. Freeman, a graduate student at Heed University, compiled an extensive collection of primary source materials, including newspaper articles, MCEA and MCPS memorandums and meeting minutes, official public statements and press releases, and many other sources. Photocopies of these original source materials are available in three three-ring binders at the MCEA office in Rockville, MD.

<sup>39</sup> A major distinction between the AFT and the NEA was the notion of “professionalism.” The NEA considered itself a professional association like the American Medical Association, while the AFT maintained a close relationship with the American Federation of Labor and understood itself to be a bread-and-butter trade union. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the two organizations competed for membership, with the AFT having more success in cities and the NEA having more success in suburban areas. During the 1960s, the NEA struggled to maintain its core commitment to “professionalism” with an increased militancy which came from the bottom up. Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900-1980* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 2. Also Don Cameron, *The Inside Story of the Teacher Revolution in America* (Lanham, MD: ScarecrowEducation, 2005), 79.

rapidly after World War Two, the teacher workforce expanded and its demographics began to change.

The new teachers were different from the generation of teachers who had worked in Montgomery County prior to the war. They were better-educated: by 1963, all secondary school teachers and 94% of elementary school teachers in the county had a bachelor's degree, and master's degrees were increasingly common.<sup>40</sup> Prior to WWII, only around half of the teachers had a bachelor's and about ten percent had a masters; the county also employed "not a few teachers without practical experience" in 1939, as opposed to the hires in the 1950s and 1960s whose college programs often included some work in front of classrooms.<sup>41</sup> Also, the percentage of male teachers in 1963 was 28 percent and growing, a notable increase from the 16 percent male workforce in 1939. And the teachers hired as the school system expanded during the baby boom tended to be young; many new teachers arrived in the county fresh out of college, seeking an opportunity to settle down in a prosperous suburban area and start their families, much as the other white-collar migrants to the area hoped to do.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> By 1963, the percentage of teachers in Montgomery County without a college degree had dropped to .5% for secondary school teachers and 5.9% of elementary school teachers. Whittier, *Seven Challenging Years*, 7.

<sup>41</sup> *The Government of Montgomery County, Maryland: A Survey Made at the Request of the Board of County Commissioners* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1941), 60-61. Hereafter referred to as "Brookings Report."

<sup>42</sup> In 1963, 31% of the 3887 teachers employed by the county were under age 32. Also, 32% of the teachers hired in 1963 were "inexperienced," which likely means they were young teachers at the beginning of their careers, although it is possible that some of these were older individuals who were entering the teaching ranks for the first time. Whittier, *Seven Challenging Years*, 9. Also, Oral history interviews with former teachers including Mike Michaelson, David Eberly, Bill Offutt, John and Barbara Grigg, and Gene Hanlon illuminate the reasons that motivated some teachers to move to the county. These former teachers all spoke about moving to the county because of its reputation of

Teachers were no longer the stereotypical mild-mannered men and proper spinsters; rather, the new generation of teachers saw themselves as upwardly mobile middle-class professionals who thought of teaching as a career choice for talented and ambitious people. They began to get more vocal about their salaries, which many felt were not sufficient to support them year-round. It was common for teachers in Montgomery County to work summer jobs during the 1950s in order to support their families, a situation that seemed at odds with the image of professionalism the teachers sought to cultivate.<sup>43</sup> More importantly, teachers believed that their salaries and working conditions were not commensurate with their credentials and education. Teachers were expected to do things like monitor lunch periods, coach sports teams, supervise student clubs, and engage in various tedious clerical tasks, all with no additional compensation. This was not compatible with the self-image as respected professionals that the new breed of teachers held.

MCEA Executive Secretary Arthur Simonds, while not a teacher himself, exuded the professionalism his member teachers craved. A stern-faced man with a receding hairline and imposing build, Simonds became Executive Secretary in 1957, the same year Taylor Whittier became Superintendent. Whittier introduced the Career Recognition Program early in their respective tenures, and Simonds used his opposition to the merit-pay scheme to establish himself as a prominent public

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valuing education, and a concurrent assumption that, as teachers, they would be valued members of the community. Oral history transcripts in possession of author.

<sup>43</sup> *Washington Post* "Montgomery Teachers Present Plea for Raise," December 14, 1955; *Washington Post*, "Teacher Raise Action Delayed," March 25, 1956. Also, during an oral history interview Bill Offutt confirmed that he worked a summer job for many years during the 1950s and 1960s, as did many of his colleagues, until the School Board adopted a "twelve month" teacher payscale that allowed teachers to do things like curriculum development and planning during the summers. This payscale was eliminated during the budget crises of the late 1970s. Oral History interview with Bill Offutt, 8/30/07, transcript in possession of author.



advocate for teachers. Like most of the teachers who belonged to MCEA, Simonds also belonged to the Maryland State Teachers Association and to the National Education Association, attending annual conventions and sitting on various panels and boards that discussed the current state of the profession and considered its future. Later in his career Simonds worked for the NEA as a specialist in leadership training, helping to cultivate a new generation of ambitious teachers and administrators.<sup>44</sup>

Simonds appreciated the rumblings of discontent from his member teachers and believed that the MCEA could do more to address these concerns. Some teachers were uncomfortable about their professional association adopting a more union-like confrontational posture with school officials, but some white-collar professionals, such as airline pilots, had joined the labor movement in recent years, and this may have helped teachers in the county see unionization as compatible with their image of teaching as an upstanding profession.<sup>45</sup> President Kennedy's Executive Order 10988 in January 1962 gave federal employees the right to bargain collectively, and although this only applied to federal employees it likely made a strong impression on Simonds and other teachers in the county. The President seemed to be indicating that other public employees could flex their organizational muscle.

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<sup>44</sup> Upon his retirement from MCEA in 1967, the staff at the MCEA created a special parody edition of their monthly newsletter, the *Montgomery County Educator* with the spoof title *Montgomery County Udder-cator* that was distributed in early January, 1968. The parody newsletter was a tribute to Simonds' years as Executive Secretary and included photos of Simonds with humorous references to his strident support of "merit pay" as the best solution to any problem, faux approving quotes from conservative School Board members, and other gentle jokes about Simonds being unprofessional and tyrannical. Obviously, these were all readily apparent jokes to anyone who had a passing familiarity with Simonds' tenure. Copy of the "*Udder-cator*" in possession of J. David Eberly; photocopy in possession of author.

<sup>45</sup> *Washington Post*, "Improved Status of U.S. Teachers Creates New Goals," November 22, 1964, 16.

Simonds wanted the School Board to recognize MCEA as the official representative organization for the county's teachers and to enter into formal professional negotiations with the association to determine the teachers' contract. Simonds preferred the term "professional negotiations" to "collective bargaining" even though they were essentially the same thing; the former term was used by NEA-affiliates like MCEA to perhaps soothe concerns from their members and the general public about the confrontational implications of bargaining. Nomenclature aside, Simonds' goal was to significantly change the relationship between MCEA and the Board. Legally-binding professional negotiations would place the MCEA across the table from school officials to discuss every aspect of a teacher's contract. In the case of an impasse, an independent mediator might be relied upon to broker a solution. More than anything else, Simonds considered this to be a matter of power and respect. Instead of relying on the MCCPTA to petition the School Board and County Council for wage increases and changes in the conditions of employment every spring, and relying solely upon the largesse of the Board and Council to agree, Simonds wanted the MCEA to be an equal partner in the development of the teacher contract.

Taylor Whittier, the Superintendent, was in a delicate position in the spring of 1962.<sup>46</sup> He proposed the across-the-board wage increase for teachers but, worried that implementing it all at once would result in a significant tax hike, recommended that the wage increase be phased in over two or three years. However prudent a

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<sup>46</sup> The Career Recognition Program is discussed in Whittier, *Seven Challenging Years*, 16-17. Also see Goldhammer and Farnar, *The Jackson County Story*, 27. Also, Guy Jewell discusses how Whittier didn't do enough to try and "sell" the program to teachers, and instead just kind of forced it upon them. Transcript of oral history interview with Guy Jewell, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 57.

decision this might have been, and however prescient Whittier might have been about the public reaction to the .38 cent tax increase, some rank-and-file teachers were angry about the recommended delay.<sup>47</sup> Whittier was also cautious about the idea of the Board entering into professional negotiations with MCEA, irking some teachers. With these stated positions coming on the heels of the fight over the Career Recognition Program, Simonds and other teachers had mixed feelings about the Superintendent.

Support for Whittier became a small point of disagreement between the MCEA and the MCCPTA. For years the two groups had worked together to try and improve the county's schools, with the MCEA allowing the MCCPTA to take a more active role in terms of public activism. But the MCEA was changing from the bottom up, the rank-and-file teachers demanding the leaders do more to oppose programs like the Career Recognition Program and do more to address teacher concerns through the establishment of professional negotiations. Whittier was strongly supported by MCCPTA, and some teachers within MCEA began to realize that their interests and the interests of the liberal MCCPTA activists might not always align. Although the teachers and the liberals agreed about the desirability of a progressive educational program, Arthur Simonds and the MCEA were also interested in specific gains for teachers that were not as important to some parents in the MCCPTA.

The progressive educational program, and the consistent tax increases to fund that program, had been monitored with growing displeasure by conservatives in the county, and the .38 cent tax increase in 1962 was a turning point for them. Although they were greatly outnumbered by the liberal suburban majority, educational

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<sup>47</sup> Goldhammer and Farner, *The Jackson County Story*, 26-27.

conservatives had sporadically been involved in educational politics for decades. In the 1940s, some of these conservatives had formed the “3 R’s Group” to protest what they believed to be “socialistic” and “collectivist” educational programs promoted by then-Superintendent Edwin Broome. At that time, they had found common cause with the liberal MCCPTA in the push for an elected School Board because they believed an elected Board would be more responsive to their concerns. The wave of migration into the county benefited the liberals by adding to their numbers, and they reaped the benefits of having an elected Board while conservatives could do little to stop the progressive educational vision that the liberals supported.

By the early 1960s, Superintendent Whittier was presiding over an expansive bureaucracy administering a progressive educational program and conservatives were exasperated.<sup>48</sup> Wylie Barrow, founder of the original 3 R’s Group, was furious that the county had strayed so far from a “traditional” curriculum emphasizing basic skills and subjects.<sup>49</sup> The .38 cent tax increase in the spring of 1962 gave Barrow and his supporters the opportunity to find allies among economic conservatives who disagreed with taxation and government growth on principle. Economic conservatives like these had formed and re-formed organizations like the “Conservative Club” in the past to try and argue for lower spending on all public

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<sup>48</sup> Part of this expansion was due to the recommendations made by McKinsey and Company, discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>49</sup> Barrow’s disappointment with Whittier, whom he helped to select as Superintendent before departing the Board, is discussed by Goldhammer and Farner, *The Jackson County Story*, 15. Also, Barrow’s membership in the 3 R’s Group and appointment to the Board are in an oral history interview with Irene Sandifer. Transcript of oral history interview with Irene Sandifer, MCA, RG 16, Series II, Box 4, 30, 31.

services.<sup>50</sup> Educational conservatives like Barrow joined with the Conservative Club to endorse some candidates for School Board in 1958, but none of them won. Two years later, a new group uniting educational and economic conservatives called the Council for Better Education (CBE) was created and endorsed candidates for School Board in 1960. All of these lost as well.

The CBE broke through in 1962 by successfully working to elect four conservative candidates to the School Board. Its campaign strategy borrowed from the liberal MCCPTA in important ways, including carefully framing and discussing the economic and educational issues in a way that focused on the common good. But unlike many other places in the American South, racial conservatism and segregation did not play a significant role in the conservative uprising in Montgomery County. As discussed in Chapter Two, desegregation in Montgomery County had been completed during the 1960-61 school year. By 1962 blacks represented only around three percent of the county's total population, and the matter of educating black children had been settled, in the minds of the white majority, by distributing them among the county's white schools. There had been only two instances of citizen resistance to desegregation, and both of these had collapsed very quickly. While it is possible that conservative calls in 1962 for lower taxes, a smaller educational bureaucracy, and a traditional curriculum were understood by some residents to be a "coded" reference to the segregated past, there is no evidence to suggest that race

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<sup>50</sup> Guy Jewell notes the on going presence of groups such as these; as an expert on local school history, Jewell's assertion that such groups dated back to the Civil War era seems reasonable. Transcript of oral history interview with Guy Jewell, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 3, 44. Goldhammer and Farner, *The Jackson County Story* also discusses the "Conservative Club," the "Council for Better Education," and a group called the "Parents League for Curriculum Improvement," 29-31.

played a significant factor in the county's turn towards conservative educational leaders in 1962.<sup>51</sup>

After their candidates for School Board failed in 1958 and 1960, the CBE leaders realized they needed to do two things in order to break the MCCPTA's influence over School Board elections, especially since the CBE had only about a hundred dues-paying members while the MCCPTA had a network of tens of thousands.<sup>52</sup> First, to sway the electorate, the CBE needed to do a better job linking educational conservatism to economic conservatism. For years the MCCPTA had argued that modest tax increases were an acceptable price to pay for a stellar school system. The .38 cent tax increase gave the conservatives an opportunity to prompt the citizenry to reconsider the cost of the educational vision promoted by the MCCPTA. The CBE fashioned a focused message that appealed not only to self-interested voters who wanted a tax cut but also to citizens concerned about the overall quality of the public school system.

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<sup>51</sup> The best proof supporting this conclusion comes from Keith Goldhammer and Frank Farner, the two scholars who studied the 1962 election and published their findings in *The Jackson County Story*. These scholars were meticulous in their collection of information and were comprehensive and unsparing in their appraisal of county politics. Goldhammer and Farner did not hesitate to criticize the motivations of activists and politicians, liberals and conservatives, and in their entire discussion race merits only a very brief mention in the introduction. It seems very likely that if there had been racial underpinnings to conservative appeals for low taxes and traditional education, these scholars would have mentioned it. Newspaper coverage of the election also did not include any mention of race affecting the election. Of course, this is not to suggest that the citizenry in Montgomery County had an admirably progressive view of racial tolerance; rather, it seems more likely that because blacks were such a small proportion of the population that most white people simply didn't think much about them at all.

<sup>52</sup> Membership in the CBE was noted after the election was over by the organization's president, see Goldhammer and Farner, *The Jackson County Story*, 31. As previously noted, the MCCPTA had 31,626 members in the mid-1950s and had added to that number by 1962, see handout, "Education is a Sound and Necessary Investment in the Future Well-being of Our Nation and it's (*sic*) Citizens", MCA, RG 18, MCCF, Series III: Committees, Box 2, Folder: Schools 1955-1980, 1.

Second, the CBE understood that simply endorsing candidates was insufficient because voters were accustomed to siding with the MCCPTA's anointed candidates. In order to break this cycle, the CBE decided to engage in the campaign directly. By chance, the four contested seats were the Board's two at-large seats, for which a coordinated county-wide campaign could be effective, and the seats in Districts 1 and 3, both of which comprised large swaths of the northern and western up-county region of the county. The CBE conducted a coordinated campaign on behalf of candidates for all four seats. This was an unprecedented step in Montgomery County; no activist group had ever raised money to distribute literature, appear at public events, and otherwise work on behalf of a particular candidate or slate of candidates for School Board. Prior to 1962, candidates ran against one another with endorsements providing the only form of outside support. The MCCPTA, per its charter, was prohibited from doing anything more, as was the teacher's association, the MCEA. The CBE, an independent group with no such restrictions on electioneering, seized control of the 1962 School Board election and swept its candidates to victory.

The main talking point for the CBE was eliminating "frills" in the school budget. This was a neat combination of economic and educational conservatism: it would trim "unnecessary" programs and spending and save money while retaining a strong program in the Three R's and other basic skills.<sup>53</sup> The CBE put together a

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<sup>53</sup> "Frills" was and is shorthand for anything that can be painted as beyond the basic, commonly-understood needs of a school or school system. This could be a material "frill" like air-conditioning in the schools or other improvements to the physical plant, or it could refer to educational materials that supplemented the basic textbook, or it could refer to a whole course of study, like art, music, or gym. After the conservatives won the four seats on the Board in 1962, various letters to the editor of the *Post* complained that "frills" like encyclopedias, experimental courses, foreign languages,

coordinated, consistent, and coherent campaign message to sway the electorate towards their candidates. Recognizing that county residents wanted good schools, the conservatives appropriated that idea and turned the MCCPTA's argument about progressive education on its head, suggesting that educational quality was *threatened* by the expanded administrative bureaucracy and experimental programs that the liberals had worked to implement. Importantly, they demanded that voters ask themselves whether the exorbitant amount they were being asked to pay in taxes truly translated into a superior educational program. The CBE attacked progressive education using the democratic mechanisms put in place by the MCCPTA a decade earlier.

The CBE identified candidates who had already begun to run for each of the four open School Board seats. William Coyle, running for an at-large seat, was critical of experimentation in the schools, which he thought created too many divisions in the educational program. "I am not against progress," Coyle said, "but I don't want to have too many balls in the air at one time." This was a particularly strong argument for the educational conservative activists because it suggested that the flexibility and experimentation that were hallmarks of the progressive educational philosophy resulted in different children getting different educations. Liberals supported this because they believed different teachers had different teaching styles while different students had different learning styles, and allowing those individual teachers and students to work with one another helped to pitch the educational experience at the right level. But conservatives saw the situation differently: they

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driver education, and others were necessary to maintain good schools, and warned the conservatives not to cut them. *Washington Post* "What Is a Frill?" Nov. 20, 1962, A16.



suggested that differences in educational experience necessarily meant that some children would get a “better” or “worse” education than others.

In addition to criticisms of the progressive educational model, the challenging candidates also touted the benefits of traditional education in the three R’s. William Saunders, an up-county resident with a high school education running for the seat in District 1, believed that the liberals in the MCCPTA looked down on him because of his lack of higher education, and he appealed to voters in the rural areas by emphasizing the importance of conventional educational curricula and pedagogy. Neither Coyle nor Saunders coordinated their campaigns with CBE leaders, but the CBE worked on their behalf anyway because the two candidates fit so well into the countywide strategy the CBE was trying to employ. The other two candidates, Charles Bell, running in District 3, and Everett Woodward, running at-large, worked closely with the CBE and tailored their campaigns around the CBE’s message. Bell noted that although he had not met the other candidates prior to the election, he felt united with them because “we are at war with a common enemy.”<sup>54</sup>

The conservatives in the CBE were fortunate that their four chosen candidates were running against four incumbents seeking reelection, helping to turn the election into a referendum on the current Board and, by extension, the overall state of education in the county. The challengers attacked the incumbents for frills and fiscal irresponsibility, and pointed to the .38 cent increase in the county’s tax rate in the spring of 1962 as evidence that the school system was costing the taxpayers too

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<sup>54</sup> Quotes are from Goldhammer and Farner, *The Jackson County Story*, 34-36. Also, a photo of the newly-elected Board in Whittier, *Seven Challenging Years*, 25 strangely features the 4 new members smiling and the three remaining incumbents looking stone-faced. Guy Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space*, 270 gives a very brief description of when the candidates chose to enter the race, and the electoral totals.

much.<sup>55</sup> The MCCPTA endorsed the incumbents but they did not actively campaign for them per the restrictions on overt political action contained in the group's charter. The incumbents defended their record of educational innovation and noted that they had presided over a period of substantial population growth that accounted for much of the expenditure increase.<sup>56</sup> Importantly, both the challengers and the incumbents appealed to the idea of good schools for everyone: the incumbents sang the virtues of progressive education and new programs like team teaching, television instruction, and "open" elementary schools, while the challengers argued that such frills were watering down the educational program while calling for more instruction in the fundamental skills. In Montgomery County, the population had consistently shown a preference for the progressive educational style espoused by the incumbents, and the conservative members of the CBE knew that a coordinated push in late October would be necessary to swing the election in their favor.

A week before the election, a group calling itself County Above Party (CAP) distributed a voter guide to over 100,000 households. CAP was a combination of CBE leaders and other political activists supporting conservative candidates for seats on the County Council.<sup>57</sup> The education section of the voter guide included all of the

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<sup>55</sup> *Washington Post*, "Taxes Stir Hot School Board Race," October 7, 1962, A30.

<sup>56</sup> Goldhammer and Farner, *The Jackson County Story*, 36-37 notes that the campaign was "conducted in a super-charged atmosphere" and was "vigorous, heated, controversial, and bitter."

<sup>57</sup> Although the CBE and MCCPTA were the two largest interest groups involved in this campaign, a number of smaller groups also emerged. CAP's sudden emergence on the scene in October, and its distribution of a voter guide which followed in lockstep the arguments that the CBE had been making for months strongly indicate that the two groups were affiliated in some way. Because the voter guide included recommendations for County Council, as well as School Board, it seems likely that the CAP organization included tax-averse citizens who were not necessarily interested in education as well as CBE members. In *From One Room to Open Space*, Guy Jewell notes the 100,000 figure; *The Jackson County Story* simply notes that CAP's voter guide was "published" a week before the election. Guy Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space*, 270, and Goldhammer and

arguments about eliminating frills and curbing excessive spending the CBE had used during the campaign. Quotes from unnamed authorities exposed the “myth of our ‘quality’ education” and bemoaned that “the last four years have been a period of sorrow for lovers of true education in Montgomery County.” The guide portrayed the incumbent Board as having presided over a period of “orgiastic spending, reduced learning standards, lower per pupil achievement, expensive bureaucracy, (and) teacher dissatisfaction.” In contrast, CAP-endorsed candidates were committed to “true education, true learning, and true value for every taxpayer’s dollar.”<sup>58</sup>

The invocation of “true” education in the CAP voter guide shrewdly appealed to the reader’s estimation what education ought to be. “True” education did not require “frills” and a sprawling administrative hierarchy; it only required a competent and efficient teaching staff and a strong emphasis on the fundamentals. The CAP-endorsed candidates “all agreed on the desperate necessity of wresting control of the educational system from the theoretical experimenters who never taught a day in their lives.”<sup>59</sup> This point targeted teachers who were upset about the Career Recognition Program the Board had implemented in 1959, and was possibly also a personal criticism of Superintendent Whittier, a career administrator with a doctoral degree.<sup>60</sup>

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Farner, *The Jackson County Story*, 37. In addition to CBE, another group, calling itself Citizens United for Responsible Elections (CURE) formed in early October, and endorsed three of the four conservative candidates for School Board; it is possible that some members of CURE were also part of the CAP group. *Washington Post*, “Taxes Stir Hot School Board Race,” Oct. 7, 1962, A30.

<sup>58</sup> Extensive excerpts from the CAP voter guide are reprinted in Goldhammer and Farner, *The Jackson County Story*, 37-38.

<sup>59</sup> Goldhammer and Farner, *The Jackson County Story*, 37-38.

<sup>60</sup> The plan, which was initiated in 1959, was halted by the Board in 1964. Whittier, *Seven Challenging Years*, 16-17.

Saunders, Bell, Thomas and Coyle all won their seats on the School Board easily, a stunning result in a county that had seen liberal candidates win almost every seat in previous elections.<sup>61</sup> The *Montgomery County Sentinel* editorialized that the tipping point in the campaign had been the CAP voter guide that exploited the theme of “waste and extravagance” in a highly effective way.<sup>62</sup> The outcome was a remarkable victory for the conservatives who packaged their arguments carefully to draw in tax-averse citizens, people skeptical about educational experimentation and perhaps some disgruntled teachers. Years of watching the liberal MCCPTA influence county voters had demonstrated to the conservatives the kinds of techniques that could resonate among the Montgomery County electorate, especially the importance of appealing to the sense of common good and overall educational excellence. The year 1962 produced a confluence of circumstances – the .38 cent increase in the tax rate, memories of the Career Recognition Program, an incumbent Board willing to staunchly defend their advocacy of progressive and experimental education, four of the seven seats on the Board up for election – that opened the door for an organized conservative minority to engineer a takeover of the Board.

More significantly, by campaigning against the very educational bureaucracy that the liberal reformers had sought to implement, the conservatives successfully tied the liberals’ preferred educational program to the idea of excessive spending. For years during the 1920s and 1930s, Edwin Broome had managed to promote a

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<sup>61</sup> The four were “somewhat surprised” that they all had won. *Washington Post*, “GOP Victors Plan Strategy in County,” November 10, 1962, C1.

<sup>62</sup> Guy Jewell summarizes the *Sentinel*’s editorial, and recounts the results of the election, in *From One Room to Open Space*, 270. In terms of “effectiveness,” Goldhammer and Farner, *The Jackson County Story* notes that the 8-page pamphlet was in the form of a tabloid newspaper, and contained cartoons and other eye-catching graphics, 38.

progressive educational vision without significantly increasing the school system's budget. By pushing to institute an expanded administrative hierarchy to oversee the continuance of that progressive program during the 1950s, as recommended by the McKinsey Report, the liberal reformers had inadvertently tied the two together. This gave conservative activists the opportunity to reframe the discussion about good schools in a way that emphasized their twin goals of lower taxes and traditional education. That they had managed to use this argument to engineer a takeover of the School Board only made the pill that much more bitter for the liberal activists who had assumed the local citizenry would always elect liberals to those important seats.

Immediately upon taking office, on December 6, 1962, the four new Board members elected Charles Bell, who had won the District 3 seat, to become the new Board President. Bell, Coyle, Saunders and Woodward formed a majority on the seven-person Board; the other three Board members were liberal holdovers Lucy Kekar, Lucille Maurer, and Clifford Beck. On December 12, Superintendent Whittier presented to the Board an operating budget for the 1963-64 school year of \$55.5 million, an increase of about \$5 million over the current year's budget, which was "as tight a budget as we can present." He listed reasons for the modest increase: nearly 2,000 new elementary school pupils would be enrolling for the 1963-64 school year, an enrollment growth of around 6.4 percent, and two new secondary and three new elementary schools would be opened. Whittier pointed out that new teachers had to be hired to staff these positions, and he noted that 83 percent of the total budget was for salaries.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Goldhammer and Farner, *The Jackson County Story*, 41-43.

William Coyle, a member of the new majority, thanked Whittier for his proposal. He then put forth a resolution that directed Whittier to provide the Board with a “listing of budget items in reverse order of priority to the amount of \$5,000,000 to help give the Board additional perspective for better understanding and evaluation of the budget request.” Essentially, this was a request for Whittier to cut the budget back to the previous year’s level, and the motion was quickly passed by a four-to-three margin. Whittier knew that with 83 percent of the budget committed to salaries the only way to make the cuts requested by the Board would be to freeze salaries or eliminate planned hires, both steps he was unwilling to recommend. Instead, on December 21 he presented the Board with a list of programs and initiatives that could be cut from the remaining 17 percent of the budget not committed to salaries. These programs included kindergarten, driver education, and foreign language instruction in elementary schools, along with various other programs that, perhaps, could be counted as “frills.”<sup>64</sup>

The local media seized on the elimination of kindergarten and other programs known to be popular among the citizenry as it reported the cuts recommended by the Superintendent. The conservative Board majority furiously accused Whittier of sensationalizing the list of proposed cuts to make the Board look bad to the public. In January and February the eight public hearings on the budget were packed by angry citizens and groups like the MCCPTA. After having been outmaneuvered by the CBE during the election, the liberal activists flexed their muscles as they had done in the past, through lobbying and putting public pressure on the School Board. The strategy was somewhat successful; on February 13 the Board adopted a budget that

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<sup>64</sup> Goldhammer and Farner, *The Jackson County Story*, 44.

cut only \$733,131 from Whittier's initial recommendation of \$55.5 million for the 1963-64 School Year.

However, in April the County Council elected to cut an additional \$2.6 million from the School Board's budget. The Council took the unusual step of hiring a private consultant to review the schools budget, who recommended that the student-teacher ratio be increased to 30:1 in elementary grades and to 25:1 in the secondary grades.<sup>65</sup> This eliminated the need for around 200 new hires and allowed the Board to cut the amount that the Council requested. William Bell, the President of the School Board, approved of the consultant's decision, saying "this is something we overlooked and I'm glad the Council picked it up."<sup>66</sup> The Board went ahead and eliminated the 200 new teacher positions by a four-to-three vote, with the liberal minority Board members complaining that the majority had allowed the Council to usurp the School Board's authority to determine where cuts should be made.<sup>67</sup> Teachers in the MCEA were very upset and quickly took out advertisements in local papers criticizing the cuts. "We shall be unable to give individual children the attention they presently receive," read the advertisement in part. "Mistakes may go

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<sup>65</sup> The decision not to hire 200 teachers in 1963 meant that the pupil-to-teacher ratio in elementary schools was increased from 28.5 to 1 to 30 to 1, and in secondary schools from 23.4 to 1 to 25 to 1. *Washington Post*, "School Budget Slashes Getting Mixed Reaction in Montgomery County," April 15, 1963, B1.

<sup>66</sup> Goldhammer and Farner, *The Jackson County Story*, 48.

<sup>67</sup> In an oral history interview, former MCCPTA leader Esther Bloomer referred to "that Board," referring to the one elected in 1962, derisively and commented that "that school board that got everybody's dander up so terribly." Transcript of oral history interview with Esther Bloomer, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 1, 44. Also, in Goldhammer and Pellegrin, *Jackson County Revisited*, 6, the authors note that the decision to eliminate 200 teachers "aroused fears among a large number of parents" because they feared the action would result in "hazardous lowering of the quality of education." In addition to parental concern, the Board's action led to the creation of the teacher-led Committee for Public Schools.

unnoticed; misunderstandings will develop. While we shall continue to do our best, it will be limited by the increased number of children in our classrooms.”<sup>68</sup>

For Arthur Simonds, the Executive Secretary of the MCEA, simply taking out an ad in the paper warning about how the Board’s action might affect the quality of the schools was not enough. The elimination of 200 planned teacher hires was a stark reminder of the unequal distribution of power when it came to determining teacher salaries and working conditions. Increasing class sizes was only one way that the Board could, at its prerogative, affect the livelihood of the teachers represented by MCEA. Freezing or reducing salaries, adding responsibilities like hallway monitoring or after-school coaching without additional compensation, transferring teachers to different schools, implementing new programs or curricula – these were other decisions that the Board could make without consulting the teachers who would be have to carry them out. Although the Board, in the past, had made efforts to include teachers in the decision-making process, some teachers felt as though this consultation was perfunctorily sought and only given attention when it conformed to the preconceived notions held by Board members or administrators.<sup>69</sup>

Simonds decided to pursue two different courses of action to try and rectify this one-sided situation. First, in February of 1963 he created a new organization

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<sup>68</sup> Goldhammer and Farner, *The Jackson County Story*, 49.

<sup>69</sup> This sentiment was expressed by teachers during the teacher strike in 1968, when one key complaint was paternalistic treatment from school officials. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, “They’re Talking About Identity,” February 8, 1968, A1. On the picket lines, the article reports, you heard “for years, teachers have felt that the work they’ve been doing on ‘advisory’ committees is meaningless; that good people won’t even agree to serve any more.”



called the Committee for Public Schools.<sup>70</sup> The CPS was designed to undertake fact-finding missions, distribute information to the public, attend Board and Council meetings, and, importantly, serve as a political action group.<sup>71</sup> Members of the group included teachers and lay citizens who supported a more liberal and progressive attitude towards schooling, and the CPS worked throughout the spring of 1963 to protest the planned cuts by attending School Board and County Council meetings and criticizing the proposed cuts in the press.<sup>72</sup> The CPS was distinct from the MCCPTA and the MCEA in an important way: this new organization was ready to become more directly involved in electoral politics.

Simultaneously, Simonds was ratcheting up the pressure on the Board to enter into formal negotiations with the MCEA on key matters of employment, notably the teacher contract. However, Simonds was caught in an odd contradiction concerning the nature of teacher “professionalism.” On the one hand, many young teachers within MCEA thought that the association needed to do whatever was necessary to secure their place at the negotiating table, even if that meant adopting an adversarial position against school officials in view of the public. A certain amount of militancy might be required to secure the compensation and control over working conditions that the teachers believed they, as credentialed and professional educators, deserved.

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<sup>70</sup> According to Goldhammer and Pellegrin, *Jackson County Revisited*, 46 the executive secretary of MCEA created the CPS in February of 1963. Arthur Simonds was the Executive Secretary of MCEA that year, see *Washington Post*, “School Budget Slashes Getting Mixed Reaction in Montgomery County,” April 15, 1963, B3. Esther Bloomer, in her oral history interview, credits Philander Claxton with creating the organization. Transcript of oral history interview with Esther Bloomer, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 1, 44; Claxton was the first Chairman of the organization and likely was involved in its creation. Also see *Washington Post*, “Montgomery Citizens Renew Teachers Plea,” June 23, 1963, A7.

<sup>71</sup> Goldhammer and Pellegrin, *Jackson County Revisited*, 23.

<sup>72</sup> *Washington Post*, “Montgomery Citizens Group Battles to Restore Fund for 200 Teachers,” May 5, 1963, B1.

On the other hand, principals and administrators were still members of MCEA and were disproportionately represented among the association's leadership. For them, Simonds' planned push for bargaining rights seemed like trade unionism, behavior that was decidedly unprofessional and unbecoming of an educator. Indeed, some older teachers thought that serving on a jury or even voting in an election impugned a teacher's professionalism, let alone publicly criticizing administrators and, perhaps, threatening to retaliate if demands were not met.<sup>73</sup>

Simonds ultimately sided with the younger teachers. He agreed that the MCEA had to assert itself as an equal partner in the ongoing administration of Montgomery County's Public Schools, and he could not allow decisions about class sizes, teacher compensation, and other vital issues to be made unilaterally by the School Board any longer. Throughout 1963, Simonds tried frequently to get Board members to take a public position on the issue of professional negotiations with MCEA, but his requests were ignored because the School Board had many other problems to confront. The 1962 election created an unprecedented divide between the four-person conservative majority who had just won their seats and the three-person liberal minority who were holdovers from the previous Board. Superintendent Whittier tended to align himself with the liberal minority, and Board meetings often devolved into hostile cross-examination of Whittier by the majority and angry complaining by the liberal minority.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Simonds had noted how some older teachers refrained from jury duty and voting in 1960, see *Washington Post*, "Teachers Push Vote Drive," September 25, 1960.

<sup>74</sup> Goldhammer and Pellegrin, *Jackson County Revisited*, 10.

Both of Simonds' strategies for advancing the interests of teachers – developing the Committee for Public Schools activist group and lobbying for the Board to formally recognize the MCEA as a bargaining agent to undertake negotiations – had a significant impact on the 1964 School Board election. In fall of 1963, with an eye on the following spring's budget battle, the conservative majority on the Board sought to limit the cost-of-living increase for current teachers, allowing them to hold down the schools budget. Alarmed, and with few options available, Simonds asked the National Education Association to investigate what he considered to be an “unbearable situation” in the county, referring both to the planned wage freeze as well as the Board's decision not to hire the 200 additional teachers the previous spring. Richard Morgan, legal counsel for the NEA Commission on Professional Rights and Responsibilities, commented that “it is apparent that there is a continuing discord and a shocking lack of rapport between the Montgomery County School Board and the professional employees of the school system.”<sup>75</sup>

The conservative majority pressed on, determined to implement the cuts.<sup>76</sup> Superintendent Whittier and the liberal minority on the Board vigorously protested, prompting Board President Charles Bell to ask Whittier for his resignation.<sup>77</sup> In March of 1964, Whittier accepted a position in Philadelphia and left Montgomery County; he was replaced by Homer Elseroad, a mild-mannered and affable

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<sup>75</sup> *Washington Post*, “NEA Enters Dispute on County Schools,” December 6, 1963, A12.

<sup>76</sup> The conservative Board did take one action that met with MCEA approval: it eliminated the Career Recognition Program in January of 1964. Arthur Simonds commented “we're not at all sorry to see the career recognition program gone. I'm sure a vast majority of teachers are glad to see it abandoned.” *Washington Post*, “Montgomery Teachers Praise Board Ruling,” January 22, 1964, B2.

<sup>77</sup> Goldhammer and Pellegrin, *Jackson County Revisited*, 10 reports that Bell asked Whittier to resign late in 1963, although not all of the conservatives on the Board agreed with Bell's request. In March of 1964, Whittier accepted a job offer from the city of Philadelphia to run its public schools.

administrator respected by nearly everyone, including both factions on the School Board. That same spring, the Board implemented its reduced cost-of-living increase and eliminated some programs as it approved an operating budget that was only 5% higher than the previous year's budget. Over the course of the past decade, budget increases had routinely been 10 or 15% above the previous year's budget figure.<sup>78</sup> The liberal minority on the Board, the liberal activists in the MCCPTA, and the teachers in the MCEA were powerless to stop the majority from taking this unprecedented action.

The Committee for Public Schools, unlike the MCCPTA and the MCEA, was able to criticize the majority's action while also working on an electoral plan to affect the composition of the Board in the future. None of the conservatives was up for election in 1964, but the three liberal minority members of the Board were, and all of them chose to run for reelection. The CPS decided to demonstrate its influence by placing its organizational strength behind the reelection efforts of liberals Clifford Beck, Lucy Keker, and Lucille Maurer. In the spring, as the budget was being debated, the CPS charged that "the 'Class of '62' is short-changing Montgomery County where it hurts the most—in its school system. We cannot remain a first-rate community if our school system is second rate. We cannot meet the needs of our

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<sup>78</sup> In the spring of 1963 the new Board worked on the FY 1964 budget but to work largely with the budget that had been developed the previous fall by the previous Board, and the final budget represented a 16% increase over the FY 1963 budget, which was a fairly typical increase. However, the following spring the conservative majority was able to implement the spending changes, particularly with regards to teacher salaries, and propose an FY 1965 budget that was only a 5.3% increase over the previous year. Whittier, *Seven Challenging Years*, 38.

children for quality education in the bargain basement.”<sup>79</sup> CPS literature cited several examples of how the Board majority had disappointed students and parents, prominently mentioning the failure to hire 200 teachers as both over-crowding the classrooms and undermining teacher morale. The CPS also accused the majority of forcing Whittier to resign, cutting back on popular programs like foreign languages and physical education, and restricting kindergarten attendance. All of this, the CPS argued, was done with a single-minded focus on cutting costs without regard to the impact on educational quality.

This kind of public relations campaign was similar to what the MCCPTA had done in the past, but the CPS took things further by working to promote the candidacies of Beck, Kecker, and Maurer. The conservative Council for Better Education had shown in 1962 that direct involvement in electoral politics could produce results, and the CPS broke down the county block by block, employing an estimated 3000 volunteers to work in the various precincts, going door-to-door, making phone calls, and holding rallies and information sessions. These volunteers were initially disappointed to discover that most county residents could not name any members of the current School Board, let alone identify who was in the conservative majority and who was in the liberal minority. But the CPS redoubled its efforts, and by November 1964 most households in the county had been visited in person and every single home had been contacted by mail.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> This excerpt is quoted in Goldhammer and Pellegrin, *Jackson County Revisited*, 24; it appears to have been from a press release or piece of campaign literature, although the authors of *Jackson* do not specify.

<sup>80</sup> Goldhammer and Pellegrin, *Jackson County Revisited*, 34.

The CBE, which had endorsed and worked for conservative candidates two years earlier, endorsed its own trio of candidates to oppose the incumbents. The battle lines were familiar: the incumbent liberal candidates promised to “regain” the ground lost the previous two years, to hire more teachers and create smaller class sizes, and to return to the “favorable educational climate” needed to boost morale within the system.<sup>81</sup> The conservative challengers promised to continue prudent spending cuts and stress the fundamentals in reading and mathematics. The CPS enjoyed tremendous support among teachers and citizens in the county. The group raised an estimated \$13,000, almost entirely from small individual donors, to help campaign for the incumbent liberal candidates. Volunteers were in ample supply, and the CPS leadership planned carefully and executed their strategies with patience and precision. The CBE, by contrast, had only a few hundred dollars and a handful of volunteers.<sup>82</sup>

Importantly, both the conservatives and liberals, as they had done in 1962, argued that they wanted the very best schools possible but disagreed strongly regarding how to achieve them. The incumbents, supported by the CPS, chose to focus on the decision not to hire the 200 additional teachers and rising discontent among current teachers as evidence that schools were on the wrong path. The CPS’s impressive network of on-the-ground volunteers went door-to-door repeating the argument that morale was low among teachers and administrators and that they needed a sign from the electorate that the public supported them and desired excellent

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<sup>81</sup> Goldhammer and Pellegrin, *Jackson County Revisited*, 32.

<sup>82</sup> It is important to note that there were no seats open on the County Council in 1964, as there had been in 1962, and some of the conservatives who had helped bankroll the CBE during the first election might have been less interested in getting involved in educational politics this time around.

schools.<sup>83</sup> Reelection of the liberal minority would not tip the balance of power on the Board, but it would demonstrate that the 1962 election had been an aberration and that the citizens in Montgomery County appreciated the need for the very best teachers operating in a positive educational environment. The CPS placed an ad in local papers shortly before the election, with the bold headline “Protest damaging cuts in essential school programs! Good schools make better citizens and a better community!”<sup>84</sup>

Meanwhile, Simonds and the MCEA used the increased attention on school matters created by an election year to ramp up their push for professional negotiations. In April 1964, Simonds invited every member of the School Board to an off-the-record dinner where he previewed a proposal to establish a new bargaining relationship that the MCEA planned to formally submit at the next Board meeting. The proposal asked the Board to recognize MCEA as the bargaining agent for all of MCPS professional employees, meaning that all matters related to salaries and working conditions would be negotiated between the Board and the MCEA. In the event of an impasse, each side would choose a mediator, and these two individuals would together choose a third mediator, and the three-person panel would resolve the dispute. Beck, Kecker, and Maurer accepted the invitation to the dinner, as did William Coyle, the member of the majority who was President of the Board in 1964;

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<sup>83</sup> Goldhammer and Pellegrin, *Jackson County Revisited*, 38. According to these researchers, the incumbents said that “because of the actions of the majority, the morale of the teaching staff had deteriorated considerably in the last two years.”

<sup>84</sup> Goldhammer and Pellegrin, *Jackson County Revisited*, 30-36.

the other three conservatives did not attend. Two months later, on June 9, 1964, MCEA officially submitted their request at a Board meeting.<sup>85</sup>

All seven of the Board members, including the liberals Beck, Kecker, and Maurer, were hesitant about the proposal and took no action on it for several months. They were concerned because the Board possessed the legal authority to pass the final budget, and Board members were wary about ceding that authority to the MCEA or to an independent mediator who might be necessary to broker an impasse. Throughout the summer Simonds worked with the new Superintendent, Homer Elseroad, to refine the proposal so that potential legal complications were clearly identified and addressed. After months of discussion and revisions to the proposal, in mid-October the Board announced that it was ready to debate the matter at a public meeting; Simonds was confident that it would pass.<sup>86</sup> After formal discussion at its meeting on October 13, the Board voted by a four to three margin on October 27 to reject MCEA's proposal.<sup>87</sup>

Simonds was furious. He accused the majority of operating in bad faith because they had allowed Elseroad to work all summer long to reach an agreement that Simonds had been led to believe was acceptable. The October 27 vote was supposed to be a formality, and Simonds fumed that he and Elseroad had wasted countless numbers of hours that could have been spent on other matters working on

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<sup>85</sup> *Washington Post* "Teachers Ask Voice in Decisions," June 10, 1966, B15. For more on the off-the-record dinner, see Goldhammer and Pellegrin, *Jackson County Revisited*, 21.

<sup>86</sup> *Washington Post*, "Montgomery Board Asked to Accept County Association as Teachers' Voice," October 14, 1964, B6.

<sup>87</sup> *Washington Post*, "School Board Controversy Flares in Defeat of Teacher Negotiation," October 28, 1964, C2.



the compromise proposal.<sup>88</sup> Immediately after leaving the Board meeting, Simonds called for an MCEA general membership meeting the following day. At that meeting, MCEA leaders passed the hat and quickly raised \$1,583 to place a newspaper advertisement supporting the liberal incumbents in the following week's election; because MCEA could not legally place such an ad, the general membership voted unanimously to form a nominally independent "Grateful Teachers Committee" to place the ad. Simonds also urged the teachers to take additional action to signal their displeasure, and the teachers in attendance voted to work to the letter of their contracts, from 8:30am until 4:30pm, eschewing all extracurricular activities and other job-related duties they regularly performed before and after school.<sup>89</sup>

On Election Day the following week, the liberal incumbents won in a landslide, by more than a three-to-one ratio. 83% of voters who voted for President also voted for School Board, an unprecedented number in the county, indicating how successful the CPS had been at highlighting the importance of the race.<sup>90</sup> CPS's superior organization certainly played a decisive role in the outcome of this election. But the victory was tempered somewhat by the fact that it only maintained the status quo on the School Board. Following the election, tensions continued to run high. Simonds filed another appeal with the NEA to investigate the "climate of education"

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<sup>88</sup> Goldhammer and Pellegrin, *Jackson County Revisited*, 43-44 notes that at least three of the four conservative Board members had given strong indications to Simonds that they would support the proposal only to reverse their position at the last minute. Also see *Washington Post*, "School Board Controversy Flares in Defeat of Teacher Negotiation," October 28, 1964, C2.

<sup>89</sup> Goldhammer and Pellegrin, *Jackson County Revisited*, 45. Also see *Washington Post* "Montgomery Superintendent Offers New Personnel Plan" November 11, 1964.

<sup>90</sup> Goldhammer and Pellegrin, *Jackson County Revisited*, 47.

in the county, which he considered to be deteriorating rapidly.<sup>91</sup> The NEA agreed to conduct a fact-finding mission and representatives of the national teacher's association interviewed more than 100 individuals, including teachers, parents, and administrators, over a three-day period in January 1965.

Two months later, the confidential NEA report was leaked to the press.<sup>92</sup> Unsurprisingly, the NEA found that the Board was divided between what citizens and teachers characterized as a "conservative majority and liberal minority," and that the Board's confrontational behavior had been "detrimental to good working relationships." The NEA also reprimanded Simonds and the MCEA for being overly critical of the Board in its publications in the run-up to the election, and urged school officials and MCEA leaders to work to repair their broken relationship.<sup>93</sup> For Simonds, the only way to repair the relationship would be for the Board to grant MCEA official recognition as the bargaining agent for the county's teachers. He continued to lobby members of the conservative majority, and later in the spring of 1965 William Saunders, a conservative who was serving as President of the Board that year, surprised his conservative colleagues by switching his position on the issue of negotiations. In a 4-to-3 vote, with Saunders voting with the liberals, the Board agreed to formally recognize MCEA and consult with them when drafting the new

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<sup>91</sup> *Washington Post* "County School Probe to Start in January," November 26, 1964, C8. Also see "Montgomery Education Probe Begins," January 12, 1965, A10. Two months later, the confidential NEA report was leaked to the press, but contained no startling revelations. The NEA found that the Board was clearly divided between what citizens and teachers characterized as a "conservative majority and liberal minority," and that the Board's confrontational behavior had been "detrimental to good working relationships." The NEA also reprimanded MCEA for being overly critical of the Board in its publications. *Washington Post* "NEA Chides Montgomery Board, Teachers," March 24, 1965, D1.

<sup>92</sup> *Washington Post*, "2 Protest Release of School Report," March 27, 1965, E10.

<sup>93</sup> *Washington Post* "NEA Chides Montgomery Board, Teachers," March 24, 1965, D1.

teacher contract. The Board stopped short of calling this consultation “professional negotiations” and did not agree to arbitration to resolve impasses, but the formal recognition was the first of its kind in the Washington D.C. area and a major victory for MCEA. The association represented over 90 percent of the county’s teachers in 1965, and for the first time they would at least have a seat at the table when the new contract was developed.<sup>94</sup>

As pleased as Simonds and others in the MCEA might have been with the developing situation, other teachers in the county harbored philosophical reservations about the relationship between teachers and administrators. The formation of the CPS and the newly assertive MCEA had been two steps in a new direction, but for some teachers these remained short of satisfactory. Simonds seemed to be settling for something less than formal bargaining rights, and some teachers suspected that many in MCEA’s leadership were more concerned about their own career trajectories than they were with improving the salaries and working conditions of individual classroom teachers in any significant way.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> *Washington Post* “Montgomery Teachers Association Recognized By School Board as Spokesman for Employees,” June 9, 1965, B1. This recognition was later rescinded, in the fall of 1965, because a lawyer for the Board of Education argued that it was illegal to designate MCEA as the negotiating unit for such matters as salaries and promotional policies. *Washington Post* “County Drops Teacher Union Recognition,” October 13, 1965, B3. However, the fact that Saunders had demonstrated his willingness to do so represented enough of a good-faith effort for many of the leaders within MCEA; the following year, the State Board of Education would issue a bylaw allowing local Boards of Education to recognize local associations or unions as official bargaining representatives.

<sup>95</sup> This is according to Joe Monte, who would serve for three decades as president of the small but persistent Montgomery County Federation of Teachers. In an article titled “Birth of a Union – 1967 Style,” published in the August-September, 1967, issue of a periodical called *P.A.*, Monte outlined the growth of a more militant teacher union in the county. Monte had saved a copy of this article, which he provided to me, and although he could not recall the name of the publication he stood by his impressions of teacher attitudes towards MCEA during the mid-1960s. MCFT will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. *P.A.* was the national magazine of the Pallottine Fathers, a Jesuit order; Monte had been a seminarian in Reading, PA, between 1951 and 1961, before moving to Montgomery County.

One of these teachers was Robert Burke, a biology teacher with fifteen years experience in the county. In 1964 as Simonds was working with Elseroad on MCEA's proposal for formal recognition, Burke decided to form a new organization called the Classroom Teachers Association. His idea was to give teachers their own voice, separate from principals and administrators, when conferring with the Board and the public. Within a few months, Burke had signed up around four hundred members. This was less than ten percent of the 4,340 teachers who worked in the schools that year, but Burke was confident that his message would attract more adherents.<sup>96</sup> He stressed that in important ways the interests of the teachers and the interests of the administration were distinctly different, and in some cases opposed, and for that reason the CTA was a necessary counterbalance to both school officials and also the MCEA. Burke did what he could to bring more teachers to his cause, at one point causing a stir by alleging that the MCEA had slandered the CTA by suggesting the new union was secretly controlled by the conservative School Board majority.<sup>97</sup>

Simonds watched Burke's organizing activities with unease. Although most of the four hundred teachers who had signed on to the CTA also remained members of MCEA, Burke presented an alternative vision to the county's teachers. If the MCEA was seen as insufficiently independent from the administration, the trade unionism of the CTA could become an appealing alternative. In December 1965

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<sup>96</sup> Guy Jewell, *From One Room to Open Space*, Appendix 10: Number of Teachers, 325.

<sup>97</sup> This was a curious charge, as the CTA was more militant than MCEA and probably would have adopted a much more adversarial position toward the Board of Education than MCEA; it is unclear why MCEA leaders would suspect that the conservative Board majority would encourage the CTA, unless they thought it would drive a wedge among the teachers. *Washington Post*, "Teacher Groups Feuding in County," November 1, 1964, B3.

Burke pushed CTA members to vote on a proposal to officially affiliate with the national teacher's union, the American Federation of Teachers.<sup>98</sup> The motion to affiliate failed by a single vote, but two CTA chose to pursue affiliation with the national teachers' union anyway. One of these teachers, Lee Wittig, began to correspond with Carl Megel, an American Federation of Labor lobbyist in Washington, while another teacher, Don Konschnik, began telephoning teachers in the county to drum up enough support to form a new organization that would officially affiliate with the AFT.<sup>99</sup> On April 29 William Hughes initiated a membership drive and attracted 350 curious teachers to a mass meeting where union leaders from Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, and Washington D.C. gave fiery pro-labor speeches to encourage the crowd.<sup>100</sup>

A few weeks later, on June 2, 1966, the Montgomery County Federation of Teachers formally submitted an application for a charter to form a local affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers. Twenty teachers – nineteen men and one woman – signed the petition, with William Hughes serving as President and Don Konschnik as Treasurer.<sup>101</sup> Robert Burke's CTA continued to hold meetings, but the

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<sup>98</sup> The American Federation of Teachers was affiliated with the American Federation of Labor.

<sup>99</sup> Monte, "Birth of a Union – 1967 Style," *P. A.*, September-November 1967, 26-27.

<sup>100</sup> The minutes of an MCFT Executive Board meeting, held on August 8, 1966, mention the rally in April and note the number of attendees. Also see Monte, "Birth of a Union – 1967 Style," *P. A.*, September-November 1967, 27.

<sup>101</sup> A copy of the application for affiliation with the AFL is contained within the MCFT records held by Bill Welsh, who allowed me to photocopy these records. There had actually been one previous attempt to affiliate with the AFL by the white teachers in Montgomery County in 1919; an application signed by thirteen teachers and dated March 25, 1919, for the creation of the Montgomery County Teacher's Union is also contained in the MCFT records. This local never got off the ground. A 1968 profile of William Hughes in the *Post* notes that he actually signed this petition to establish a local on March 26, 1966 – his fifth wedding anniversary. If this is correct, Hughes signed it that day

AFT affiliation gave the MCFT immediate legitimacy in the county. Meanwhile, Art Simonds and the MCEA decided the best way to handle the upstart union was to ignore it as much as possible, because the association had secured the exclusive recognition from the School Board. Simonds and other MCEA leaders began planning for the development of the new teacher contract, which would occur in the winter of 1967-1968.

The MCFT tried to circumvent the exclusive recognition the Board had granted MCEA by submitting its own proposals about a school calendar and revised salary structure in the fall of 1966.<sup>102</sup> The School Board accepted the proposals without comment and took no action on them. Meanwhile, there was another School Board election in 1966 and the Committee for Public Schools was working hard to replicate its electoral strategizing success from 1964. The CPS identified four liberal candidates for the open seats who all promised voters that they would reverse the policies of the conservative majority that had run the Board from 1962 to 1966.<sup>103</sup> The CPS organizational apparatus was pressed into action, and although it may have been slightly less thorough in its blanketing of the county than it had been in 1964, the results were satisfactory. Only two members of the conservative majority who

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but dated the document June 2 when he finally got around to submitting it. *Washington Post*, "From Pythagoras to Pay Scales," March 7, 1968, E2.

<sup>102</sup> According to the November 8, 1966 meeting minutes, the MCFT and MCEA, along with the CTA (which continued to exist even as the MCFT was siphoning members) all presented school calendar proposals to the Board of Education, and the Board disregarded all of these and adopted a calendar with 195 duty days and 185 instructional days. Monte "Birth of a Union – 1967 Style," *P. A.*, September-November 1967, 28.

<sup>103</sup> This proved to be a small problem for some of the CPS volunteers, who asked "what are our candidates *for*?" Ultimately, these concerns did not stop the volunteers from trusting that the CPS leadership had selected desirable candidates, and the CPS get-out-the vote machine worked fairly well during the summer and fall of 1966. Goldhammer and Pellegrin, *Jackson County Revisited*, 78.

had won in 1962 ran for reelection, and both lost to CPS-backed liberal candidates. Many observers were confident that the schools were back on the right course.

Leaders of the MCFT were nervous about the perceived return to the way things had been prior to 1962. That would mean that MCEA would continue to serve as the only voice for teachers in the county, and although Simonds had carved out a potentially powerful position for the association, the teachers in the MCFT remained skeptical about whether the MCEA would truly represent teacher interests when the negotiating began. Without the conservatives on the School Board, MCFT leaders feared that the county's teachers would lose the sense of urgency that had propelled so much educational activism over the previous four years. On November 8, the MCFT held a general membership meeting attended by thirty-five teachers, and an English teacher named Joe Monte proposed that members of the union protest at the upcoming School Board meeting on November 21<sup>st</sup>, which would be the first meeting of the newly-elected Board. The plan was to protest the previous Board's lack of recognition of MCFT's proposed salary schedule and school calendar, as well as to signal to other teachers in the county that the union was a vibrant and active alternative to MCEA. The executive board of MCFT wanted this to be a "well organized and thoroughly professional demonstration," orderly and respectful; they notified the School Board to request permission to demonstrate and called local papers in advance.<sup>104</sup> Thirty-four of those in attendance voted in favor of the demonstration, and Monte was placed in charge of rounding up teachers to participate.

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<sup>104</sup> Meeting minutes, November 8, 1966, general meeting of MCFT members, p. 2. MCFT records, held by Bill Welsh, copy provided to author.

On a bitterly cold November 21<sup>st</sup>, Monte and around thirty teachers showed up at BOE Headquarters. Getting teachers to participate had been difficult; Monte later reflected that all of teachers he'd spoken to had been enthusiastic about the idea until he asked them to join the protest themselves. Only fifteen teachers confirmed that they would attend, so Monte was pleased to see twice that number on the night of the meeting. School Board members chatted politely with the teachers as they entered the building, glancing at the picket signs reading "Collective Bargaining for Teachers," "DC Transit Drivers Start at \$6,800/Montgomery County Teachers start at \$5,500," and "June 20 too late," this last placard referencing the end-date of the work year for teachers.<sup>105</sup> Local media covered the protest, and membership began to increase. By the following summer, the MCFT had over 300 dues-paying members.<sup>106</sup>

In truth, Monte's concern that the return of a liberal majority to the School Board in 1966 would undo the changes in educational politics was misplaced. Although the Board's composition might have looked like as it had prior to 1962, the liberal activists in the MCCPTA no longer enjoyed the influence they had held over the school system during the 1950s. The democratic mechanisms the liberals had put in place had been effectively deployed by conservative activists demonstrating the

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<sup>105</sup> In addition to increased salaries, MCFT very much wanted the school calendar itself to be negotiated, with holidays and duration subject to discussion by teachers and the Board. Monte, "Birth of a Union – 1967 Style," *P. A.*, September-November 1967, 29.

<sup>106</sup> *Washington Post*, "Union Woos County Teachers," May 15, 1966, K13. The 300 members that MCFT would have in the summer of 1967 marked more or less a high point for the organization. As will be discussed shortly, MCEA leaders were definitely aware that the local AFT affiliate was siphoning members, and this awareness probably helped contribute to the decision by MCEA leaders to take a harder line in negotiations in the fall of 1967, and to strike in February of 1968. Following the strike, MCFT did momentarily attract a few more members, but its membership never really took off the way its leaders hoped it would. This is probably because since MCEA had more than half of the teachers in the county as members, it was officially designated as the sole bargaining agent for teachers in the county.



potential appeal of an alternative educational vision. Their victory was secured because the conservatives in the Council for Better Education took a new step in educational activism in the county by raising money and directly campaigning for their slate of candidates. Their strategy was quickly emulated by the Committee for Public Schools, and in the 1970s the MCEA eschewed its longstanding policy of non-engagement in electoral politics and joined the fray as well. School Board elections became more competitive, the rhetoric grew more heated, and the consequences seemed more dire as the years passed.

Over time, the process of educational politics characterized by local grassroots democratic pluralism prompted citizens to become more concerned about their public schools. New groups of people, like conservatives and teachers, joined the conversation and argued that the present situation fell unacceptably short of their educational visions for quality schools. Moreover, there were splits and divisions within the ranks of the teachers, with the militant trade unionists in the MCFT arguing for a subtly but distinctly different interpretation of the relationship between teachers and school officials than the vision promoted by Arthur Simonds and the MCEA. The liberal activists, who had grown accustomed to having sway over the trajectory of the school system, strongly disagreed with the conservative vision of good schools but also found themselves not entirely aligned with the county's teachers, some of whom seemed focused more on material gains and less on overall educational quality. Members of different groups evaluated the situation and resolved to work harder to make sure that their vision of excellence prevailed; they were all very concerned about what might happen if their vision failed. The unacceptable

possibility that Montgomery County's schools might be slipping began to creep into the minds of many county residents.

The types of activism employed by different groups and organizations in the county became more sophisticated and varied over time. The MCCPTA endorsed candidates and pressured school officials at public meetings, but the conservative activists went a step further by directly engaging in fund-raising and campaigning for School Board candidates during the 1962. Teachers, through the CPS, quickly followed the conservative lead by effectively campaigning for candidates in 1964 and 1966 while also joining the MCCPTA at public hearings to argue specifically for teacher concerns. Arthur Simonds and the MCEA opened up yet another line of activism through their push for professional negotiations, and although the Board's willingness to "consult" fell short of formal negotiations Simonds remained confident that the contract discussions would be a way to advance a vision of educational excellence focused on teacher professionalism. The rising number of interested parties in the county brought with them new methods of activism, complicating the process of debating the present and future of the county's public schools.

The increasingly complicated and contentious world of educational politics in Montgomery County during the mid-1960s reflected the national political mood. The liberal consensus of the 1950s, which was never as tranquil or consensual as it may have appeared on the surface, was challenged from both the right and the left as grassroots conservatives and leftist associations and organizations questioned the status quo. The conservative victory for seats on the School Board in Montgomery County in 1962 was short-lived but perhaps indicated how conservative arguments

could prevail in the future, especially if conservatives could fuse economic appeals with a broader sense of common concern like the promotion of a quality public school system for everyone. Increased militancy among teachers, and success at both electioneering and changing the relationship between the administration and the MCEA, indicated that as an organized group of workers teachers had considerable power. Liberals remained the dominant group in Montgomery County, as they did across the nation, but their ability to dominate the discussion and implement policies had been lessened considerably.

In the fall of 1967, MCEA representatives sat down with school system officials to discuss the new teacher contract. When these discussions reached an impasse, the teachers staged a strike that paralyzed the school system for more than a week and shocked many observers in the county. A public confrontation like this involving a disagreement over the county's public schools would have been unthinkable only a few years earlier, but a lot had changed since the days when Superintendent Edwin Broome single-handedly ran a school system that was beloved by all. Indeed, the politics created by multiple groups of concerned activists promoting distinctly different educational visions made a major altercation practically inevitable.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Unprofessional Behavior: The 1968 Teacher Strike**

On February 6, 1968, national television news anchor David Brinkley closed the Huntley-Brinkley Report by commenting on an ongoing work stoppage. “By some measurements,” he began, “Montgomery County, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D.C., is the richest county in the United States. Its taxes are high, and the schools are considered good. Today its schools are closed because the teachers are on strike. Among other things, they want more money – a starting salary of \$6,600 a year. In New York City, the garbagemen are on strike demanding \$7,024 a year. They’ve been offered \$6,800. The teachers in the richest county in the United States are on strike trying to get \$200 a year less than New York City has offered its garbagemen. Good night, Chet.”<sup>1</sup>

The teacher strike marked another significant turning point for educational politics in Montgomery County. A walkout called by the Montgomery County Education Association forced the county’s public schools to close for six school days and compelled administrators to increase the starting salary for new teachers in the county as part of a revised teacher contract. The strike attracted attention from the National Education Association; its president, Braulio Alonso, visited Montgomery County twice before returning to his home state of Florida to encourage teachers there to undertake a statewide walkout. Immediately following the strike, legislators in Annapolis worked to pass a new law requiring local School Boards in Maryland to enter into formal negotiations with organizations representing teachers, and an

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<sup>1</sup> Transcript of the *Huntley-Brinkley Report*, February 6, 1968. Personal collection of J. David Eberly; reproduction in possession of author.

explicit no-strike clause was included in part because the strike in Montgomery County had demonstrated a new level of militancy among teacher. As a result of the strike, teachers in Montgomery County, who had demonstrated a new willingness to engage in electoral politics in 1964 and 1966, further distinguished themselves as an activist group willing to bring its influence to bear on educational politics in the county.

Although in some ways the teacher strike can be considered a success for the teachers and the MCEA, Brinkley's concise summary hinted at a potentially troubling development for the association in the future. The anchor casually dismissed the "other things" that prompted teachers to strike and emphasized the issue of inadequate salaries, echoing a common theme in the way the teachers' walkout was portrayed locally by the media and understood by members of the public. Although the leaders of the MCEA, many rank-and-file teachers, and the members of the rival teacher union Montgomery County Federation of Teachers were concerned about issues like professional autonomy, teacher input into decision-making, respectful treatment from administrators, and other dimensions of their working conditions, they were not able to communicate effectively these ideas to the general public. This was an important failure because for years teachers had enjoyed support in the county, including support from liberal activists who had understood the teachers' well-being as inextricably linked with the overall quality of the school system. Having their reasons for striking reduced to a simplistic attempt to inflate their own salaries cast teachers as interested in their own material gain above all, even at the potential expense of the educational program. This chapter discusses how the 1968 strike was

simultaneously a great success and harbinger of impending failure for the Montgomery County Education Association and the teachers in Montgomery County.

The 1962 School Board election, when four conservative candidates won a majority of seats on the Board, had a negative effect on teachers' morale in the county because of the conservative School Board's cost-cutting. In 1963 and again in 1965, MCEA Executive Secretary Arthur Simonds asked the National Education Association to investigate the deteriorating "climate of education" in the county, and the NEA was distressed to find low teacher morale and general pessimism about the trajectory of the county's schools.<sup>2</sup> Simonds believed teachers were pessimistic because the conservative School Board had disregarded teacher objections to their cuts, exposing the imbalance of power between the Board and MCEA.<sup>3</sup> Many teachers felt as though administrators treated them as "second-class citizens," characterized by a condescending paternalism.<sup>4</sup> School officials were accustomed to giving orders and expected teachers to carry them out, and by the mid-1960s many

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<sup>2</sup> *Washington Post*, "NEA Enters Dispute on County Schools," December 6, 1963, A12; *Washington Post*, "2 Protest Release of School Report," March 27, 1965, E10.

<sup>3</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3, in 1963 the Board had opted not to hire 200 new teachers and to raise the student-teacher ratio instead; in 1965 the Board had frozen teacher salaries and discontinued some programs popular with the faculty.

<sup>4</sup> The "second-class citizens" comment was made by a teacher during the strike. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, "They're Talking About 'Identity,'" February 8, 1968, A1. Also, the word "paternalism" was used frequently, both in private meetings as well as in public announcement, by MCEA leaders during December 1967 and January 1968, the months leading up to the strike. *Montgomery Sentinel*, "Teacher Salary Dispute Moving Toward Climax," January 11, 1968. Also see "A Message to Montgomery County Teachers and their MCEA Delegates," 12/30/67, which refers to "paternalistic maneuvering to submerge and negate teacher opinion." MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 233. The Montgomery County Education Association does not maintain archives, but in the early 1970s a graduate student named John F. Freeman compiled an extensive assortment of primary sources, including newspaper clippings, official documents from both the MCEA and MCPS, letters and other correspondence, meeting minutes, and other documents relating to the teacher strike in 1968. Freeman used these sources to write a master's thesis about the strike, and although MCEA does not have a copy of this thesis the author donated copies of all of the primary source materials to the association. These sources are held in three binders at the MCEA offices in Rockville, Maryland, and are referenced extensively in this chapter.

teachers were growing tired of the situation. Teachers believed that, as the professional educators who worked in the classrooms, their opinions on compensation and working conditions ought to be respected by the administration.

Simonds argued that the way for the Board to demonstrate this respect was to grant the MCEA official recognition as the representative organization for the county's teachers and establish legally-binding professional negotiations of the teacher contract. The Board stopped short of that but in 1965 agreed to consult with the MCEA, and the Maryland State Board of Education issued a new bylaw in 1966 requiring local school boards to consider the recommendations from local teacher organizations.<sup>5</sup> Words like "consult," "consider," and "recommend" were chosen carefully by the local and state Boards of Education when describing the role that local teachers' associations could play in the development of teacher contracts, and some teachers in Montgomery County remained skeptical. These teachers saw the interests of teachers and administrators as fundamentally opposed, and they formed a small but vocal organization, the Montgomery County Federation of Teachers. Members of the MCFT believed teachers needed to be protected from capricious and arbitrary behavior by their superiors, to be guaranteed due process rights in the event of an allegation of misconduct, and to have a collectively-bargained contract that was

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<sup>5</sup>The local School Board had done this a year before the Maryland State Board of Education issued a new bylaw requiring local School Boards to "consider" the "recommendations" of local associations. Both the local School Board's position and the Maryland state bylaw stopped short of establishing full-fledged negotiations, which meant that the local associations retained the ultimate authority to develop and impose whatever contract they deemed appropriate, even over the objections of a local association like MCEA. Bylaw 232:2, July 8, 1966, is reproduced in September 12, 1967 internal memorandum from the Office of the Superintendent of Schools in Montgomery County. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 43-45. Internal notes from the MCEA Executive Committee in August of 1967 indicate that the leaders of the association assumed that the upcoming consultation was equivalent to professional negotiation for all intents and purposes. MCEA Executive Committee Meeting minutes, August 22, 1967. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 24.

inviolable no matter what happened in School Board elections any given November. The conservative takeover of the Board in 1962 and that Board's decisions to eliminate planned hires and pay increases had demonstrated how powerless teachers were to prevent these kinds of changes to their working conditions. Teachers, in the eyes of MCFT members, were workers who needed the protections, guarantees, and security that other unionized workers enjoyed.

In the fall of 1967 school officials sat down with MCEA reps. Leaders of both the MCEA and MCFT understood the importance of this first round of discussions with the local School Board under the new state bylaw. The tenor and outcome of these discussions would set a precedent for future discussions and demonstrate how school officials intended to work with teachers on their contract going forward. During the 1967-68 school year, the school system employed about 6,200 teachers and about 4,200 of these were members of MCEA. The association also welcomed about 1,500 administrators as members.<sup>6</sup> Because a significant majority of the county's teachers were part of MCEA, the association was granted "professional exclusive recognition" to represent the county's teachers in the contract discussions.<sup>7</sup> This exclusivity annoyed the leaders of the MCFT, which only had about 300 members, and the union petitioned both MCEA and the Board to allow its representatives to take part in the discussions; their pleas were largely ignored.

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<sup>6</sup> The total number of teachers, 6,200, and the number represented by MCEA, 4,200, are noted in the *Washington Post*, "MCEA Votes Strong Stand on Salaries," January 23, 1968, C1, and the *Montgomery County Sentinel*, "Teacher Talks Are Resumed," February 1, 1968, A1. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 310. The figure of 5,700 total teachers and administrators represented by MCEA is reported in the *Washington Post*, "Montgomery Teachers Call Strike Today; Schools Open," February 2, 1968.

<sup>7</sup> The formal status granted to MCEA is discussed in MCEA Executive Committee Meeting minutes, August 22, 1967. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 24.



MCEA leaders were confident that they had been granted a new level of input into the development of the contract and were optimistic about what they could achieve.<sup>8</sup> This was an opportunity for teachers to have their vision of educational excellence written into the contract that stipulated the conditions of their employment. Teachers believed that the contract, including their compensation and the articulation of their responsibilities, was indicative of the respect that administrators had for teachers as professionals. Teacher morale had been depressed by the lack of respect shown by the conservative School Board in the mid-1960s, and that contributed to an inferior educational environment for everyone. Conversely, a generous contract, fairly negotiated, would serve as a step towards a better school system staffed by a professional staff who felt valued and supported. In the teachers' minds, there was a very clear link between the contract they were about to discuss and the future trajectory of the public school system.

MCEA hoped to increase the starting salary for new teachers to \$800 per month, a significant increase over the prevailing starting salary of \$588.<sup>9</sup> A competitive starting salary for new teachers would attract the best young teachers to the county and allow them to buy a home and join a prosperous community.<sup>10</sup> MCEA

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<sup>8</sup> MCFT was invited to submit its own list of priorities and suggestions for the salary agreement, but was not granted a formal meeting with school system officials that year. MCEA's optimism about the upcoming discussions are expressed in "MCEA Goals for 1967-68," a document adopted by the MCEA Delegate Assembly, September 7, 1967. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 40.

<sup>9</sup> Teachers were employed on a 10-month calendar, so the figure of \$800 per month and \$8,000 total were used interchangeably by teachers. Obviously the \$800 figure was probably intended as a starting point in the negotiations with the school system, although as the standoff with the administration grew more heated in the winter of 1967-68 it continued to be mentioned by MCEA reps as the desirable starting point for the salary schedule.

<sup>10</sup> A recent college graduate, working as a teacher Montgomery County during the 1967-68 school year, noted that Maryland college students were looking closely at starting salaries, which they

reps also wanted to negotiate planning periods, work-free lunches, and more freedom to innovate in the classroom, as well as fewer non-teaching responsibilities like coaching, supervising lunchrooms or student club activities.<sup>11</sup> As one teacher, Katherine Tift, commented during the strike, “I attended four years of college and four years of graduate school, and I’m prepared to work with a child’s mind, not do cafeteria duty.”<sup>12</sup> At the very least, teachers wanted those extra responsibilities to come with extra compensation. For years all decisions about the salaries and working conditions of teachers were made unilaterally by school officials, a situation that teachers increasingly found inappropriate and disrespectful.

Although representatives from the MCEA did not consult with the MCFT, their goals were largely in sync. An internal MCFT memorandum on the question of “professionalism” pointed out that the fundamental function of a teacher was to teach, and that being required to perform any other task was a detriment of that skill. Teachers had been goaded into performing all sorts of duties, including monitoring hallways and cafeterias, chaperoning various activities and supervising clubs, recruiting their own substitutes in times of sickness, and various other mundane and

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considered to be representative of how much a county cared about attracting quality teachers to the area. See “Delegate Digest,” January 12, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 258. Also, an article in the *Maryland Monitor*, published in January 1968, noted that sufficient salary to buy property in the prosperous county was a specific concern voiced by MCEA members at the meeting, on January 25, when the decision to strike was actually made. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 299.

<sup>11</sup> The *Montgomery County Sentinel* reported a “recent study” that concluded that “classroom teachers spend 80 percent of their time controlling, ordering, and directing their pupils.” In other words, much of what a teacher was being asked to do was keep order, as opposed to teach. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, “They’re Talking About ‘Identity,’” February 8, 1968, A1.

<sup>12</sup> *Washington Post* “Teachers Show Wide Discontent,” February 6, 1968, B1. Ellen Hoffman, a *Post* reporter, interviewed about twenty teachers on the picket lines and included their quoted responses in a larger piece about the issues involved in the strike.

time-consuming tasks.<sup>13</sup> The MCFT wanted to protect teachers from a cost-cutting or mean-spirited principal attempting to assign such tasks to save money or as a form of punishment.

Still, a question lingered: what could, or should, teachers do if discussions reached an impasse? MCFT proudly adopted the “union” label and considered “the right to protest – to vigorously pursue the betterment of career goals” as inherent and inviolable.<sup>14</sup> Its membership, though small, believed that a confrontational and adversarial position was necessary to make sure that the goals of teachers were sufficiently addressed by school officials. To them, the interests of teachers (workers) and the interests of school administrators (management) were not congruous and teachers needed an organization that would advance their interests and deploy tactics ranging from collectively bargained contracts to due process hearings to slowdowns, walkouts or strikes in order to make sure teachers were treated fairly.

MCEA members, on the other hand, traditionally saw themselves not as workers in a trade union but as white-collar professionals who belonged to a

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<sup>13</sup> Jack Bledsoe, an art teacher in the county, estimated he spent 400 unpaid hours as the yearbook advisor during the 1966-67 school year. However, Bledsoe also noted that he volunteered for the assignment, and noted that teachers who complained about time spent on extracurricular activities always had the option not to volunteer. *Washington Star*, February 5, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 42. Interview with Jack Bledsoe, 11/2/08, transcript in possession of author.

<sup>14</sup> John Vartoukian, “The Question of Professionalism,” circa 1967, MCFT Archives, personal collection of Bill Welsh. Since the mid-1970s, the Montgomery County Federation of Teachers has only boasted a handful of members; for all intents and purposes, the MCEA is the only active teacher organization in the county. A few dedicated original members from the late 1960s, including Joe Monte and Bill Welsh, continue to maintain that the MCFT exists, and Welsh has a large collection of meeting minutes, publications, and other records from the history of the union. He allowed me to copy many of these, and all MCFT sources are still held by Bill Welsh; copies in possession of author.

professional association.<sup>15</sup> The MCEA, like other NEA affiliates, welcomed both teachers as well as administrators like principals as members; all members were seen as partners in an ongoing mission to provide quality education. The growing feelings of disrespect felt by teachers in the county put MCEA leaders in an awkward position. MCEA leaders had traditionally been hesitant to take a defiant pose with regards to school administrators, but by 1967 the association's leadership knew that MCFT could be seen as a viable alternative.<sup>16</sup> MCEA was caught between a growing sense of working-class trade unionism that was bubbling up from within its ranks and the traditional understanding of teaching as a respectable and middle-class profession that the association had embraced.

This tension was not unique to Montgomery County during the 1960s. Because of the baby boom school systems across the country had hired thousands of new teachers following World War Two, and these teachers tended to be younger, better-educated, and were more likely to be men than teachers in previous generations. Teaching became a career choice for talented, ambitious, and upwardly mobile individuals, and their professional self-image collided with the way principals

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<sup>15</sup> A major distinction between the AFT and the NEA was the notion of "professionalism." The NEA considered itself a professional association like the American Medical Association, while the AFT maintained a close relationship with the American Federation of Labor and understood itself to be a bread-and-butter trade union. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the two organizations competed for membership, with the AFT having more success in cities and the NEA having more success in suburban areas. During the 1960s, the NEA struggled to maintain its core commitment to "professionalism" with an increased militancy which came from the bottom up. Marjorie Murphy *Blackboard Unions: The NEA and the AFT, 1900-1980* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 2. also see Don Cameron *The Inside Story of the Teacher Revolution in America* (Lanham, MD: ScarecrowEducation, 2005, 79.

<sup>16</sup> This was not an idle concern. Although MCFT only had around 300 members and struggled to recruit more, Allegheny County had also started up an AFT local which had quickly recruited over 25% of the county's teachers. The Baltimore Teachers Union had won an election among the city's teachers and successfully negotiated a contract, while a local in Washington, D.C. was poised to do so. See meeting minutes, November 21, 1967, 1. MCFT Archives, personal collection of Bill Welsh.

and administrators had traditionally treated teachers. The new teachers found working conditions to be unsatisfactory and realized that their unions or professional associations could be a mechanism to affect change. Decades of union successes in the United States, including, by the mid-1960s, federal public employee unions gave teachers a clear blueprint to compel administrators to change their behavior and treat teachers better. Teachers in Montgomery County believed they could use collective action, traditionally employed by members of the working class, to secure the compensation, autonomy, and respect consistent with their notion of teaching as an upstanding profession.<sup>17</sup>

MCEA leaders were somewhat concerned about how this display of solidarity might be viewed by members of the public. For years, the liberal activists in the Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations had successfully advanced the cause of teacher compensation and reduced class size while lobbying for increases to the entire operating budget, effectively linking teacher concerns with other educational improvements. But in 1967 MCEA was set to discuss the teacher contract in isolation, which might make it harder for teachers explain their concerns to the citizenry. The tactics of collective bargaining could be seen as confrontational and antagonistic, and both labor and management sometimes portrayed their

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<sup>17</sup> The transformation of the workforce in Montgomery County is discussed in Chapter 3. Also see Murphy, *Blackboard Unions*, 222-231. Murphy notes that the AFT was the first to embrace direct action as a means of achieving collective bargaining status, and that the NEA adopted the tactic later, in part to fend of a growing challenge in suburban areas by AFT locals. Wayne Urban argues that militancy came from both the local and national levels during the 1960s, while the state associations were most hesitant. Wayne J. Urban, *Why Teachers Organized* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1982). Also see Don Cameron, *The Inside Story of the Teacher Revolution in America* (Lanham, MD: ScarecrowEducation, 2005); David Selden, *The Teacher Rebellion* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1985) Steve Kink and John Cahill, *Class Wars* (Federal Way, WA: Washington Education Association, 2004); Steve Golin, *The Newark Teachers Strike: Hopes on the Line* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Jerald Podair, *The Strike that Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

opponent as selfish and inflexible as part of the process of negotiation. The MCEA preferred to use the euphemism “professional negotiations” rather than “collective bargaining” in part because of the potential stigma attached to the latter term. Teachers believed they were credentialed and experienced experts on the front lines of education in the county, and they believed improving their working conditions would result in a superior educational program for the county’s students. The MCEA had to hope that the public would understand the nuance of this educational vision should discussions with administrators reached an impasse.

Like MCEA leaders, school officials also spent the summer of 1967 preparing for the upcoming salary discussions. Superintendent Homer Elseroad appointed a Salary Advisory Committee comprising four administrators, six Federal employees, four private sector employees, and two housewives to hold a series of meetings and create a list of recommendations. Their report advocated minimal increase in the starting salary for new teachers but a larger increase for experienced teachers and administrators, a potential point of conflict with the MCEA because most teachers in the county were still on the lower end of the salary scale.<sup>18</sup> Young teachers, trying to establish themselves in an affluent suburban community with rising property values, often had to supplement their income with part-time work in the summer, an

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<sup>18</sup> Jim Politis, who was a young teacher in the county in 1967, likened the salary scale to the way most people look at the prices of gasoline: nobody, according to Politis, looks at the most expensive premium gas. Most people have their eye on the lowest listing. Politis was among those teachers who saw the low starting salary offered by the school system as insulting, and the promise of higher compensation many years down the road did little to mollify his anger. Oral history interview with Jim Politis, 5/16/08, transcript in possession of author.

unacceptable situation to MCEA and a key reason why the association hoped to increase the starting salary.<sup>19</sup>

The Committee also suggested a differentiated pay scale whereby teachers who took on additional responsibilities could receive higher pay. These additional responsibilities included lower-level administrative duties like that of a Department Coordinator or a Teacher Specialist who would rotate among several schools, but did not include additional compensation for duties like cafeteria monitoring or other comparable tasks.<sup>20</sup> The Committee anticipated that MCEA might consider this a form of “merit pay” but argued that it was simply an attempt to introduce some “fundamental changes in the basis upon which our teachers are paid.”<sup>21</sup> The idea was not to reward some teachers for being better than other teachers but to reward those teachers who chose to assume additional administrative responsibilities. Superintendent Elseroad agreed with the Committee and noted that the proposed “compensation plan would make it possible for teachers, who successfully perform professional tasks beyond those usually associated with normal teaching duties, to attain salaries equal to those in professions other than teaching.”<sup>22</sup> As far as school system officials were concerned, teaching by itself did not warrant salaries

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<sup>19</sup> In the mid-1950s, around 1,200 of the 2000 teachers employed by MCPS worked part-time jobs. *Washington Post*, “Teacher Raise Action Delayed,” March 25, 1956, B9. Bill Offutt indicated that this was still common practice in the 1960s. He talked about working part time in the summer as a lifeguard and handyman during and remarked that this was far from unusual. Oral history interview with Bill Offutt, 5/14/07, transcript in possession of author.

<sup>20</sup> “Report of the Salary Advisory Committee to the Montgomery County Board of Education,” September 13, 1967, 8, also 37-38. Original in possession of William Offutt; copy in possession of author.

<sup>21</sup> “Report of the Salary Advisory Committee to the Montgomery County Board of Education,” September 13, 1967, 1. Original in possession of William Offutt; copy in possession of author.

<sup>22</sup> Salary Proposal for Fiscal Year 1969, p. 1. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 70.

commensurate with other professions. In order to be treated like professionals, teachers would have to do more than merely teach.

The two sides sat down in November of 1967 for the first official consultation in the county's history. Superintendent Elseroad knew that officials in other Maryland counties would be watching because this was the first test of the state bylaw that required local Boards "consider" the recommendations of local teacher organizations. Elseroad hired Gordon Anderson, a hard-nosed veteran negotiator from Chicago, to head the team representing the school system in the contract discussions.<sup>23</sup> The hire indicated that Elseroad understood the new state bylaw made the relationship between MCEA and the school system more confrontational, as the MCFT had anticipated. On the other hand, MCEA leaders, apparently thinking the discussions would be polite and conciliatory, sent two teachers and a principal, inexperienced in negotiating, to meet with the Superintendent's team. While the teachers ultimately took to the streets to demonstrate their opposition to the school system's salary proposal, the Superintendent adopted an adversarial position first.

After meeting for several days, the negotiating teams from MCEA and the school system signed an agreement on November 15. By and large, the Salary Advisory Committee's report, which had been leaked to the public in early September, was adopted as the new salary agreement.<sup>24</sup> Starting salary for beginning

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<sup>23</sup> Hank Heller, a longtime member of MCEA and later a member of the Maryland House of Delegates, recalled that Anderson "took them to the cleaners" during the negotiations, displaying a delight in acting like a "hard S.O.B." Oral history interview with Hank Heller, 10/12/07, transcript in possession of author.

<sup>24</sup> The leak was greatly resented by MCEA. By leaking the report, the school system had effectively framed the discussion around their proposals. MCEA Executive Committee member Helen Lange was frightened, noting that the publicity around the report "made one feel as though this was 'it'



teachers was increased from \$588/month to \$610 a month for a ten-month contract, well below the \$800/month that MCEA had offered as its starting point.<sup>25</sup> The agreement also included \$300,000 earmarked for the establishment of the differentiated pay scale for teachers who assumed more administrative responsibilities.

Discontent rumbled as word of the negotiated agreement spread among teachers in the county.<sup>26</sup> The salary agreement had been signed by the MCEA consultation team but had to be ratified by the MCEA Delegate Assembly, 226 representatives from the county's elementary, junior high, and high schools.<sup>27</sup> The Delegate Assembly met on December 5, and many delegates complained about the low starting salary and the differentiated pay scale, which they contended would "remove teachers from the teaching process and create a number of positions where teachers would not come into contact with the students." The proposed contract seemed not to value teachers as teachers, who would receive modest compensation for their work in the classroom but only earn more money and respect by teaching

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on salary proposals." MCEA Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, 9/29/67, MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 51.

<sup>25</sup> Back in February of 1967, before official consultations began, Elseroad had taken the unusual step of announcing publicly his willingness to increase his offer to teachers from \$580 to \$590 a month. This was likely a public relations maneuver designed to establish that MCPS was willing to be somewhat flexible on the issue of starting salary. *Washington Post*, "Area Schools Seek Basis for Teachers' Pay," February 5, 1967, B5.

<sup>26</sup> This included the MCFT, whose members thought the negotiated deal was terrible for teachers, see meeting minutes of November 6, 1967, 1. MCFT Archives, personal collection of Bill Welsh.

<sup>27</sup> The Delegate Assembly was made up of 226 members representing each of the elementary, junior, and senior high schools as well as Montgomery College, a junior college in the County.

less.<sup>28</sup> After almost three hours of heated debate, the Delegate Assembly voted to ratify the agreement, 80 to 45.

Anger continued to simmer and the Delegate Assembly reconvened two days later, on December 7, in the cafeteria at Julius West Junior High School for three more hours of speechmaking and debate, characterized by “bitterness, frustration, (and) anger.”<sup>29</sup> Teachers were incensed because it seemed like school officials had once again given minimal consideration to teacher concerns and simply adopted the contract recommended by the Salary Advisory Committee. The consultation with MCEA representatives seemed to have been perfunctory, another example of paternalist treatment of teachers by school officials, and the cafeteria crackled with pent-up frustration and resentment as the debate continued. At the conclusion of this meeting, the Delegate Assembly voted unanimously to reverse the decision taken two days earlier, reject the negotiated agreement, and demand to reopen discussions with MCPS.

This was a bold and confrontational action, unlike anything MCEA had done in the past, and Fred Sacco, the President of MCEA, was distressed enough to immediately submit his letter of resignation. Sacco believed that the salary agreement had been negotiated, signed, and ratified by the Delegate Assembly on December 5. It was too late for MCEA to back out of the deal, and the Assembly’s attempts to do so were unacceptable and seemed to undermine the very professional

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<sup>28</sup> MCEA Delegate Digest, 12/6/67. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 139.

<sup>29</sup> MCEA Delegate Digest, 12/8/67, MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 142.

status that MCEA was trying to prove its members deserved.<sup>30</sup> Sacco was replaced by David Eberly, a young history teacher from Gaithersburg High School sympathetic to the concerns expressed by members of the Delegate Assembly.

Sacco's resignation as President was perhaps not as significant as the departure of MCEA Executive Secretary Arthur Simonds in the fall of 1967. During his eleven years at MCEA, Simonds had been a strong and stable leader for the association. His decision, announced in late October 1967, to accept a position at the National Education Association in Washington, D.C., left the MCEA with something of a leadership void.<sup>31</sup> Simonds had years of experience working the local, state, and national officials and was more familiar with the issues, policies, and potential compromises to the brewing controversy than young David Eberly. It is a striking irony that the professional negotiations Simonds worked for years to establish careened toward a major confrontation between the MCEA and school officials at the very moment that Simonds chose to remove himself from the proceedings.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Letter of resignation by Fred Sacco, December 8, 1967. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 157.

<sup>31</sup> Simonds left to become a specialist in leadership training and executive director counseling for the Urban Division of the NEA, according to his resignation letter. He ceded responsibilities on November 30, 1967, less than a week before the Delegate Assembly met to vote on the proposed salary agreement; because of accrued annual leave time, Simonds was paid through December 31. MCEA Executive Committee Minutes, Thursday, October 26, 1967. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 61.

<sup>32</sup> The *Tribune* published a photo of Simonds' farewell reception, held on December 1, 1967, including a photo of a smiling Simonds shaking hands with an equally-jovial Superintendent Homer Elseroad. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 162. Also, the staff at the MCEA created a special parody edition of their monthly newsletter, the *Montgomery County Educator* with the spoof title *Montgomery County Udder-cator* that was distributed in early January, 1968. The parody newsletter was a tribute to Simonds' years as Executive Secretary and included humorous references to Simonds believing "merit pay" was the best solution to any problem, mock quotes from the conservative Board members with whom Simonds had clashed from 1962-66, and other gentle jokes about Simonds being unprofessional and tyrannical. Obviously, these were all readily apparent jokes to anyone who had a passing familiarity with Simonds' tenure. Copy of the "*Udder-cator*" in possession of J. David Eberly; copy in possession of author.

Like Sacco, Superintendent Elseroad also considered it quite unseemly for the MCEA to reopen contract discussions. Elseroad believed a negotiated agreement had been reached in good faith and ratified by the Delegate Assembly in its initial meeting on December 5. “It is not appropriate to reopen negotiations,” Elseroad said in a letter to Eberly. “Any other position is indefensible because there is no point in reaching agreement if the agreement can always be rescinded at any subsequent meeting of the Delegate Assembly.”<sup>33</sup> As far as Elseroad was concerned, due process had been followed, MCEA negotiators had signed the agreement, and it had been ratified. There would be no further discussion.

As Elseroad and Eberly were slowly settling into their impasse, another drama was unfolding a few blocks away at the County Council’s office in downtown Rockville. In late November, the Council announced plans to raise an additional \$21 million in tax revenues by raising the local surcharge on the state income tax from 20 to 50 percent.<sup>34</sup> This tax revenue was needed to pay for anticipated increases in county services, including the public schools; it seems very likely that the Council anticipated the new teacher contract would require additional funds. Almost immediately groups like the Fighting Taxpayer’s Association and the Allied Civic Group complained that “citizens have had no time to comment on this major decision prior to Council action,” reflecting the expectation among county residents that government officials consider the input of citizens and their representative

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<sup>33</sup> Letter from Homer Elseroad to Ellsworth Moe, December 11, 1967. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 168.

<sup>34</sup> *Washington Post*, “Montgomery Faces 50% Income Surtax,” November 29, 1967, A1.

organizations.<sup>35</sup> The divisions among county residents about educational philosophies reverberated in other aspects of local politics as well. Representatives from several groups, associations and organizations petitioned against the planned tax increase at a public hearing on Monday, December 11; members of the Council were “clearly impressed by a strong public protest against its plan to raise taxes.”<sup>36</sup> A few days later, two members of the Council publicly reversed their position, noting that the overwhelming and immediate public display “persuaded them to withdraw their support for the tax increase.”<sup>37</sup>

All of this occurred before the dispute between MCEA and school officials became public. In the past, county residents led by the liberals in the MCCPTA defended tax increases to pay for public services like schools, but that usually occurred at springtime hearings specifically focused on education spending. The announced tax increase in November of 1967 prompted resistance from people who were against tax increases on principle, and they marshaled an impressive display of opposition mere days after the Council announced its plan. Tax-averse activists had become more influential during the 1960s, most notably in 1962 when opposition to the .38 cent increase had helped conservative candidates win seats on the County Council and School Board. The era of interest group pluralism the liberals had initiated during the late 1940s provided an opportunity for vocal activists to bring pressure to bear on public officials, and over time these activists became more and

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<sup>35</sup> *Washington Post*, “Montgomery Council Hit for Income Tax Rise Vote,” December 2, 1967, B2.

<sup>36</sup> *Washington Post*, “Tax Protest Turns County to New Revenue Search,” December 13, 1967, B2.

<sup>37</sup> *Washington Post*, “Tax Protest Turns County to New Revenue Search,” December 13, 1967, B2; “Montgomery County Tax Rise Plan Seems Dead,” December 15, 1967, C1.

more determined to do so. MCEA officials may have not taken note of the public opposition marshaled by anti-tax groups in early December, but school officials realized the public's enthusiasm for a tax increase seemed to be low.

After Elseroad's refused to reopen negotiations to reconsider the teacher contract, new MCEA President David Eberly called a special meeting of the Delegate Assembly on December 12 to vote on whether to issue sanctions against the Superintendent.<sup>38</sup> These sanctions amounted to little more than a public rebuke, but as word of the possibility of sanctions spread the local media began to cover the ongoing dispute. The *Montgomery County Sentinel*, the *Washington Evening Star* and *Washington Post* all filed several articles in December of 1967. These media outlets tended to front-load their stories with the discussion of MCEA sanctioning the Superintendent and hinted at the possibility of a strike in the future.<sup>39</sup>

Striking was becoming an increasingly common tactic for public school teachers during the late 1960s. In February 1968, shortly after the Montgomery County strike ended, teachers in Florida staged a statewide strike to protest what they considered inadequate state financing of schools in the first ever statewide strike by public school teachers.<sup>40</sup> Later that month, the NEA announced that five other states – New Mexico, South Dakota, Idaho, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania – were

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<sup>38</sup> MCEA Delegate Assembly Meeting minutes, December 12, 1967. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 180.

<sup>39</sup> *Washington Evening Star*, "Montgomery Teachers Revolt at Pay Package," December 8, 1967. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 160. *Washington Post*, "Montgomery School Head Firm on Pay Rate; Teachers to Meet," December 12, 1967. Also see *Washington Evening Star*, "Threat of Teacher Sanctions in the Air in Montgomery," MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 185.

<sup>40</sup> *New York Times*, "Militant Teachers Found Aiming at Legislators and Governors," March 4, 1968. Clipping in possession of J. David Eberly, copy in possession of author.

contemplating similar statewide actions.<sup>41</sup> In the fall of 1968, Albert Shanker led one of the biggest and most influential teacher strikes, briefly paralyzing New York City.<sup>42</sup> Some people believed that increased militancy by the National Education Association was in response to membership drives by American Federation of Teacher; NEA affiliates went on strike to demonstrate that they could deliver for teachers.<sup>43</sup> The small but growing MCFT was an example of a beachhead by an AFT local in a county that had belonged to the NEA for a hundred years.

Also, teacher strikes seemed to be at least somewhat influenced by sit-ins, marches, protests, and other acts of civil disobedience that had attracted media attention and, in some cases, produced results during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>44</sup> Teachers in Montgomery County and elsewhere were young and perhaps idealistically inclined to see direct action as an acceptable route to take if traditional channels failed. The desire for input and the willingness to take confrontational steps in order to be heard had roots in the Civil Rights and students' rights movements as well as the growing antiwar movement, and Montgomery County's teachers believed their cause to be worth marching for.

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<sup>41</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, "Teachers' Strike Threat Hits 5 States," February 24, 1968. Clipping in possession of J. David Eberly, copy in possession of author.

<sup>42</sup> Jerald Podair provides an excellent discussion of the New York strike, including an appreciation of the intersection of class and race as well as the flawed promise of community control of schools. Jerald Podair *The Strike that Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

<sup>43</sup> Murphy, *Blackboard Unions*, 222-231.

<sup>44</sup> James Sullivan, in an article about the teacher walkout in Florida in 1968, argues that the strike failed in large part because the citizens of Florida were preoccupied with the Vietnam War and associated the striking teachers to the anti-war protesters who were seen by many Floridians as unpatriotic. James Sullivan "The Florida Teacher Walkout in the Political Transition of 1968" in *Southern Labor in Transition, 1940-1995* (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 206.

It might have been a stretch for these white middle-class professionals to consider their desire for respectful treatment from school administrators to be comparable to the respect and human dignity sought by African-Americans who sat defiantly at lunch counters or to be equal in magnitude to the deaths of tens of thousands of people in Southeast Asia. But at the same time teachers wanted to be heard and were tired of what they perceived to be years of condescension and paternalism displayed by administrators.<sup>45</sup> They also genuinely believed that the benefits they sought would translate into a better public school system for everyone, and hoped that the public would appreciate that point. Unfortunately, media coverage condensed the struggle to a simplistic fight about money, and this bothered the teachers who believed the dispute was more about the respect shown (or not shown) to teachers by administrators.<sup>46</sup>

Eberly and other MCEA leaders were, to a certain extent, in over their heads. Nicknamed the “Gaithersburg Gang” or “Gaithersburg Mafia” by some in the county, the new leaders were mostly male classroom teachers from the up-county area that included Gaithersburg and Rockville who had filled the power vacuum that occurred when Sacco resigned.<sup>47</sup> Eberly did not have much experience leading a large

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<sup>45</sup> The word “paternalism” was used frequently, both in private meetings as well as in public announcement, by MCEA leaders during December and January. *Montgomery Sentinel*, “Teacher Salary Dispute Moving Toward Climax,” January 11, 1968. Also see “A Message to Montgomery County Teachers and their MCEA Delegates,” 12/30/67, which refers to “paternalistic maneuvering to submerge and negate teacher opinion.” MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 233.

<sup>46</sup> There were occasional references to “professionalism” and some of the other goals that teachers believed they were standing up for, but these were far outweighed by the emphasis on the starting salary. *Montgomery County Sentinel* “County’s Teachers Joining Move Toward Professional Equality,” January 18, 1968, B19.

<sup>47</sup> The nickname “Gaithersburg Gang” or “Gaithersburg Mafia” was mentioned in an oral history interview with Jim Politis, 5/16/08, transcript in possession of author. Bill Offutt also mentioned the nickname in an oral history interview, 8/30/07, transcript in possession of author. Offutt



organization, dealing with the media, or as a negotiator. Although Eberly appreciated that teachers were angry, once Elseroad refused to reopen discussions Eberly quickly found himself with limited options.

On December 27, MCEA Executive Secretary Ellsworth Moe sought the advice of a lawyer, Victor Crawford, about whether the salary agreement was legally binding, whether the Board's adoption of this agreement prevented further discussion/negotiation, and, most drastically, what kind of legal jeopardy the teachers would find themselves in if they submitted mass resignations or went on strike.<sup>48</sup> Crawford responded that legally the Board was not bound by the negotiated agreement, and, in fact, that the Board could modify the contract however it pleased since there was no legal requirement that any recommendations by MCEA be heeded. The 1966 bylaw passed by the State Board only stipulated that local Boards of Education "consider" the "recommendations" of groups like MCEA. Crawford noted that a strike would be illegal, but there was no clear legal precedent for how county officials could deal with a strike by teachers and Crawford hinted that only the leaders would likely be punished, and even this would likely not be overly harsh.<sup>49</sup>

Eberly and his "Gaithersburg Gang" met and agreed that consultation with both the Maryland State Teachers Association and the National Education

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repeated the nickname in his written account of the strike, see William Offutt, "The Teachers Strike in Montgomery County," *The Montgomery County Story*, Vol. 51, No. 2, May, 2008, 14.

<sup>48</sup> Letter from Ellsworth Moe to Victor L. Crawford, December 27, 1967. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 222.

<sup>49</sup> Letter from Victor L. Crawford to Ellsworth Moe, December 28, 1967. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 224.

Association would be necessary for guidance going forward.<sup>50</sup> Irwin Coons, from the NEA, and Morris Jones, from MSTA, attended MCEA Executive Committee Meetings in December and January to provide advice and input. Coons and Jones were more experienced and knowledgeable about relationships between School Boards and local associations, and provided helpful suggestions to the local leaders, such as when Coons recommended that MCEA apply to the NEA DuShane fund to help pay for Crawford's legal counsel.<sup>51</sup> Also, MCFT's presence in the county was well-known, and Coons and Jones likely encouraged MCEA's defiant stance because they suspected it would help the NEA hold on to Montgomery County.<sup>52</sup>

On the other hand, it would be incorrect to suggest that the local MCEA leadership was manipulated into its position by higher-ups from the state and national associations. The initial decision to adopt a confrontational position regarding the administration had come from classroom teachers at the Delegate Assembly meeting on December 7; no NEA or MSTA representatives were at that meeting. Coons tempered his advice about applying to the DuShane fund by warning the local association to be "very careful invoking sanctions" and suggested that they did "not have a leg to stand on in censuring the Superintendent." The militancy was coming from the bottom up, as was the case with other NEA local affiliates across the country

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<sup>50</sup> MCEA Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, December 7, 1967, 4. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 146.

<sup>51</sup> MCEA Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, December 13, 1967, 2. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 192.

<sup>52</sup> Local newspapers played up the MCEA-MCFT conflict in January as the situation was reaching a boiling point. One noted that "the union is delighted by the spectacle of MCEA's rejection of the salary package" and pointed out that MCFT was "quietly collecting new members and preparing for probable spring elections to determine the teachers' agent in collective bargaining." *Montgomery Sentinel*, "Teacher Salary Dispute Moving Toward Climax," January 11, 1968.

during the late 1960s.<sup>53</sup> The portrait of a national battle between the NEA and AFT is not wholly incorrect, but it wrongly implies that national leaders were controlling activities like pieces on a chessboard.<sup>54</sup> In fact, the NEA was mostly reacting to what its affiliates were attempting to do, and in the case of Montgomery County the complaints of the teachers stemmed from locally based concerns about sufficient pay to reside in an affluent county, consideration of workplace conditions consistent with the trained and educated professionals the teachers believed themselves to be, and, most of all, a history of paternalism and condescension from MCPS officials.<sup>55</sup>

Local citizens' groups like MCCPTA were hesitant to come out strongly on the side of the teachers as the situation escalated in January of 1968. At a Delegate Assembly meeting in January, Eberly commented that "those organizations around the county that in the past have proved to be our strongest supporters" were reluctant to support MCEA because "they have not understood what we are doing" during the

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<sup>53</sup> Don Cameron, whose history of the NEA is fairly comprehensive, concedes that NEA was definitely changed from the bottom up, with the motivation coming from local affiliates. Interestingly, he does not offer many explanations regarding why the local teachers might have been motivated to make these changes. Cameron, *The Inside Story of the Teacher Rebellion in America*, 78-80.

<sup>54</sup> To be sure, at the local level, the presence of MCFT did not go unnoticed. In January, as momentum towards a strike was building, one local reporter noted that "neither of the 'opposing' sides make any bones about the fact that the threat of MCEA's rival group, the Montgomery County Federation of Teachers (AFL-CIO) is a large consideration in the point-counterpoint maneuvering over the salary schedule." *Montgomery County Sentinel*, "Teacher Talks Are Resumed," February 1, 1968, A1. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 310.

<sup>55</sup> One small, but perhaps significant, sign of this lack of respect came in the publication of "School Board Flashes," a newsletter issued by the School Board following each meeting and made available to the general public as well as distributed to all of the county's schools. The "Flashes" reporting on the January 9, 1968 meeting contains no mention of MCEA or the simmering dispute. This omission seemed to convey that either the Board considered the matter settled or, perhaps, that it deemed the ongoing discontent a trifling matter, a nuisance to be ignored rather than legitimate complaints that warranted discussion. See "School Board Flashes, Meeting of Tuesday January 9, 1968," MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 249.

standoff with the administration.<sup>56</sup> Eberly was referring to groups like the MCCPTA, but he was also expressing concern that the general public might not understand why the teachers were upset. In this kind of uncertain situation, the simple explanations offered by the media – that the teachers wanted higher salaries for themselves – were more likely to gain traction than more detailed explanations about professional autonomy and respect that teachers sought. Also, displays of civil disobedience across the country during the 1960s were not uniformly supported by suburbanites who watched them on the nightly news. To some Montgomery County residents, such militancy and lawlessness were problems to be corrected, not tactics to be emulated, and the MCEA leadership risked alienating a segment of the public if they chose to push the confrontation further.

Throughout January 1968, Eberly attempted to persuade Superintendent Elseroad to reopen negotiations, and Elseroad continued to refuse. With few options remaining, Eberly called an MCEA general membership meeting for Monday, January 22 after school at the Shady Grove amphitheater, a large in-the-round facility located just off Rt. 70, the main traffic artery that bisected the county running north from Washington, D.C. That afternoon, cars snaked down the thoroughfare reducing traffic to a near-standstill between Rockville and Gaithersburg as an estimated 2,200 teachers, out of around 6,200 teachers employed by MCPS that year, packed the theater.<sup>57</sup> The atmosphere was raucous and energetic, with the most militant speakers

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<sup>56</sup> Report given to MCEA Delegate Assembly by David Eberly, January 4, 1968, 3. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 245.

<sup>57</sup> The MCEA represented about 5,700 teachers and administrators. During the 1967-68 school year, the county employed about 6,200 teachers. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, “Teachers Undecided on Action,” January 26, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 304.

leading off and getting enthusiastic applause. Things reached a fever pitch when Braulio Alonso, the President of the National Education Association, made a surprise appearance. “I believe nothing less than professional days or a walkout or closing the schools will accomplish what you want,” Alonzo argued. “Are you ready to do it?” He was answered by shouts of “yes, yes,” cheers, and a standing ovation as he left the stage. A short while later, Eberly asked teachers to stand if they supported a resolution “to do whatever is necessary” to resolve the situation; an estimated three-fourths of the crowd rose in support.<sup>58</sup>

Not everyone was pleased by the meeting in Shady Grove. Edward Thibault, a representative from the MCFT, claimed to have been “manhandled” by an MCEA rep on the way to his seat. Thibault complained that teachers were presented with two options: either take no action at all, or give the MCEA leadership a “blank check” to “do whatever is necessary.”<sup>59</sup> Also, speakers cautioning against taking “radical action” and calling for a secret ballot vote to determine next steps were only given the floor after Eberly received authorization for MCEA leaders to do whatever they deemed necessary.<sup>60</sup> Some people who were at the meeting claimed that the situation was “rigged” to put the militant speakers first and keep moderate voices offstage

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*Washington Evening Star*, “Montgomery Renews Talks on School Pay,” January 26, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 305.

<sup>58</sup> *Washington Post*, “MCEA Votes Strong Stand on Salaries,” January 23, 1968, C1. Also see *Montgomery County Sentinel*, “Teacher Talks Are Resumed,” February 1, 1968, A1. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 310. For a description of the meeting written by someone who attended and, forty years later, interviewed both David Eberly and Claire Nissenbaum, a reporter at the *Montgomery County Sentinel* at the time of the strike, see William Offutt “The Teachers Strike in Montgomery County,” *The Montgomery County Story*, Vol. 51, No. 2, May, 2008, 15.

<sup>59</sup> Minutes for membership meeting, Montgomery County Federation of Teachers, February 4, 1968, 1. MCFT Archives, personal collection of Bill Welsh.

<sup>60</sup> *Washington Post*, “MCEA Votes Strong Stand on Salaries,” January 23, 1968, C1.

while the crowd was whipped into a frenzy.<sup>61</sup> William Offutt, a teacher from Bethesda, noted that the speakers counseling moderation were given the stage only after the voice vote had been conducted and a fair portion of teachers had already departed the theater.<sup>62</sup> Also, three-fourths of the estimated 2,200 in attendance had risen to signal their support “to do whatever is necessary,” but that figure – perhaps 1,700 people – represented a little less than one-third of 5,700 teachers and administrators represented by MCEA, and barely one-fourth of the 6,200 teachers employed in the county.<sup>63</sup>

The *Washington Post* covered the Shady Grove meeting on the first page of section C, and the *Montgomery County Sentinel*, the largest suburban weekly paper, covered the meeting as front-page news. Both media outlets played up the possibility of a strike in the near future and reduced the dispute between MCEA and school officials to a squabble about money. By this point, the standoff had been building for two months, and it seems likely that most people in the county were at least vaguely aware that something was going on. A casually interested person, reading the *Post*

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<sup>61</sup> James Judd, a teacher at Peary High and a former member of the MCEA Executive Committee, angrily denounced the meeting at Shady Grove months later, saying that the strike was “engineered” by devious means and was “immoral and illegal.” *Montgomery County Sentinel*, “School Strike Rigged, Teacher Here Charges,” August 15, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 3, 230.

<sup>62</sup> Offutt suggested that many teachers had left to return home for supper. William Offutt, “The Teachers Strike in Montgomery County,” *The Montgomery County Story*, Vol. 51, No. 2, May, 2008, 15.

<sup>63</sup> Both the *Post* and the *Sentinel* agreed that around 2,200 people attended the meeting. The *Sentinel* reported that 1,600 had risen in favor of Eberly’s call, while the *Post* did not specify a number but stated that “three-fourths” had stood. *Washington Post*, “MCEA Votes Strong Stand on Salaries,” January 23, 1968, C1. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, “Teacher Talks Are Resumed,” February 1, 1968, A1. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 310. The figure of 5,700 total teachers and administrators represented by MCEA is reported in the *Washington Post*, “Montgomery Teachers Call Strike Today; Schools Open,” February 2, 1968.

and *Sentinel* coverage of the meeting at the Shady Grove Theater, would likely have taken away a very simple message: the teachers wanted more money.

This was true, of course, but it was not the whole truth, or at least not the whole truth that many teachers wanted the public to appreciate. To have their detailed concerns – about being treated with respect by the administration, about wanting to have more control and autonomy over their time and classrooms, about wanting to link their working conditions with a positive educational climate that benefited everyone – reduced to a simple matter of demanding more money was more than just a simplification. It actually worked against their other goals by making it seem as though teachers were selfishly trying to grab more for themselves. A higher starting salary was one thing that teachers wanted, but it was far from the only thing; yet as the strike approached it seemed to be the only message getting out to the general public.

After the meeting in Shady Grove, Superintendent Esleroad and his negotiator Gordon Anderson agreed to sit down with MCEA reps. The two sides met daily during the last week of January to try and reach an agreement.<sup>64</sup> MCEA President Eberly continued to ask both for an increase in the starting salary for teachers as well as other improvements, including a reduction of class sizes and more counselors and aides, which would allow teachers more planning time. It was important for Eberly to maintain these demands because they demonstrated teacher concern for the overall educational experience within the school buildings. Elseroad agreed to increase the school system's position on starting salary, from the \$610/month that Anderson had

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<sup>64</sup> Board of Education Minutes, Special Session, February 1, 1968, 2. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 312.

originally negotiated, to \$625/month and also to shelve the implementation of the differentiated salary schedule that would reward teachers who took on administrative duties. These were significant concessions by Elseroad; the meeting in Shady Grove demonstrated to the Superintendent that teachers were upset, and he offered what he thought was a reasonable compromise as a gesture of good faith.

At a Board meeting on Thursday, February 1, Eberly demanded a starting salary of \$660/month as well as other program improvements; Lucy Kekar, a Board member who had been very supportive of teachers as a member of the liberal School Board minority a few years earlier, expressed astonishment at Eberly's continued insistence. MCEA, she said "is either insincere in its requests or not facing reality if it believes both its salary demands and its improvement demands can be met." She found Eberly's position "very difficult to understand," and her colleague Lucille Maurer, who was also part of the liberal minority during the mid-1960s, noted that "the public has made it amply clear to slow down on the budget" and was not likely to embrace any new taxes to fund MCEA's requests.<sup>65</sup> Maurer was referring to the coordinated activism by tax-averse citizens in early December, and she concluded that since the only way to solve the impasse was with more money, MCEA's real disagreement was not with the Board but with the public.<sup>66</sup>

That was probably true. Increasing the starting salary to \$660 would require an additional \$3.5 million above the budget that Elseroad had prepared for the

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<sup>65</sup> Maurer was likely referring to the widespread public opposition expressed when the County Council proposed an increase in the Montgomery County surtax to 50 percent of the state income tax. *Washington Post*, "Montgomery Airs its School Budget," January 29, 1968.

<sup>66</sup> Board of Education Minutes, Special Session, February 1, 1968, 5. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 319.



upcoming year. The Board could propose a higher operating budget but that would have to be approved by the County Council, which was exceedingly unlikely since, as Maurer noted, public enthusiasm for tax increases was low. Eberly's hard line in the face of the compromise proposed by Elseroad after the Shady Grove meeting was puzzling to school officials. Elseroad had offered a starting salary of \$625, a six percent increase over the current starting salary of \$588, and to shelve the differentiated pay scale as a way to demonstrate how seriously he took teacher concerns about respect for their professionalism. Eberly's decision to reject this offer and insist on an even higher starting salary was risky, especially since it adhered to the simplistic storyline that had been developing in the media about teachers trying to get as much as they could for themselves.

Eberly and Elseroad were unlikely antagonists in the developing drama. Both were known to be calm, reasonable, and thoughtful men. In addition to teaching history at Gaithersburg high school, Eberly held a law degree and also occasionally served as a preacher. At the time of the strike he was a thirty-one-year old father of three daughters who had been a member of MCEA since he had arrived in the county, fresh out of college, a decade earlier.<sup>67</sup> He was emblematic of the new breed of teacher, a well-educated and ambitious young man who saw teaching as a profession deserving of respect and generous compensation. His calm and affable personality inspired widespread devotion among the teachers during the dispute with the

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<sup>67</sup> Eberly attended Manchester College in Indiana. Upon graduation, he applied to several different counties in Maryland, where both he and his wife had family. He eventually received offers to teach from Carroll, Frederick, Montgomery, Baltimore, and Howard counties, but because the Montgomery offer arrived first Eberly moved his family to Gaithersburg. Oral history interview with David Eberly, 4/27/07, transcript in possession of author.

administration; one commented during the strike that he “really should be called St. David.”<sup>68</sup>

Elseroad, too, was known for his unruffled demeanor, trademark bow tie and instinct for forging compromises and finding the middle ground. He had been appointed Superintendent in 1964 and immediately worked to finesse the rift between the conservative four-person majority and the liberal three-person minority on the School Board. Even after the strike began, Elseroad initially avoided legal action because he anticipated that involving the courts might create lingering animosity. He was sure that things could be resolved because, as he was overheard to remark during the strike, “those MCEA people are such nice people.”<sup>69</sup> As individuals neither Elseroad nor Eberly could be described as militant or mean-spirited, although both of them adopted antagonistic positions that belied those personalities. Elseroad opted to bring in the veteran negotiator Gordon Anderson during the initial discussions about the contract, while Eberly quickly resorted to the ultimate weapon in MCEA’s arsenal, the strike.

After failing to make headway with the School Board on February 1, Eberly convened a Delegate Assembly meeting at Julius West Junior High School later that evening. The Delegates arrived at the school as the clock approached midnight and voted on a resolution instructing MCEA “members and other colleagues in the profession (to) withhold all professional services from the Montgomery County

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<sup>68</sup> *Washington Post*, “2 Strike Adversaries Really Quite Alike,” February 11, 1968, D1.

<sup>69</sup> *Washington Post*, “2 Strike Adversaries Really Quite Alike,” February 11, 1968, D1.

Public Schools.”<sup>70</sup> The resolution passed unanimously, but the vote was perfunctory; upon arrival delegates were given a packet of papers, the first of which read “Instructions for Picketing.”<sup>71</sup>

At 6:12 am on Friday, February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1968, David Eberly sent a telegram to Homer Elseroad expressing his regret that MCEA would have to take “drastic action” to bring about a “salary schedule acceptable to Montgomery County Teachers.”<sup>72</sup> The telegram was a formality; Elseroad already knew about the vote taken by the Delegate Assembly the night before and spent the overnight hours trying to develop a contingency plan using substitute teachers, administrators, and parents to fill in for any teachers who went on strike.<sup>73</sup> Concurrently, MCEA put into action a phone tree to make sure that all teachers were apprised of the situation. Neither Eberly nor Elseroad could be sure what would happen; Eberly hoped that at least half of the teachers would stay out, while Elseroad anticipated a small number might stay away.

The morning of February 2<sup>nd</sup> was cold and wet, and as dawn broke small groups of teachers began forming in front of most of the schools in the county. One elementary school teacher, Margaret Zierdt, marched alone in front of her school while holding a solitary placard.<sup>74</sup> At many other schools, 10 or more teachers

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<sup>70</sup> Minutes from MCEA Delegate Assembly Meeting, February 1, 1968, 3. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 1, 326.

<sup>71</sup> Oral history interview with Jim Politis, 5/16/08, transcript in possession of author.

<sup>72</sup> Telegram copy in MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 1.

<sup>73</sup> Elseroad was also in touch with *Washington Post* reporter Lawrence Feinberg, who noted in the second paragraph of his February 2 article that “Elseroad urged parents to send their children to school as usual. He said the system would try to staff teacherless classes for which Education Association members do not show up by using administrators and substitute teachers.” *Washington Post*, “Montgomery Teachers Call Strike Today, Schools Open,” February 2, 1968.

<sup>74</sup> Oral history interview with Margaret Zierdt, 5/15/08, transcript in possession of author.

wearing hats, overcoats and scarves rounded out the picket lines carrying signs reading “We Tried Everything” and “We Care. Do YOU?”<sup>75</sup> Student members of the pep band at Walter Johnson High School grabbed their instruments and played in support of the picketing teachers. At Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School, students offered to join the picketing teachers, holding hand-made signs declaring “Seniors Support Teachers;” others brought the picketing teachers coffee.<sup>76</sup> The students at Wheaton High School were rounded up in the auditorium until someone pulled the fire alarm; after evacuation, most students did not come back. Many students at other high schools simply walked out; one was overheard saying “why should I go to school? They don’t have any teachers. There’ll just be some old lady there.”<sup>77</sup> By 9:00am, fewer than 400 of Montgomery Blair High School’s 2,200 students were still in the building.<sup>78</sup> Elseroad’s plan of using parents and administrators to maintain a normal school day proved futile, particularly in the junior high and high schools. Elementary schools had an easier time keeping order, but by midday Elseroad elected to close all of the schools an hour and a half early.<sup>79</sup>

Eberly was elated. MCEA reported that over 70% of teachers stayed out.

Elseroad would not admit that figure but conceded that at least half of the county’s

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<sup>75</sup> *Washington Post*, “No School Monday in County,” February 3, 1968.

<sup>76</sup> *Washington Evening Star*, “Students, in Holiday Mood, Pick Sides in Strike,” February 2, 1968, C1. The students who offered to join the picket lines were politely turned away by the teachers, who appreciated the support but worried that student participation would undermine the seriousness of the cause. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 11.

<sup>77</sup> *Washington Post*, “No School Monday in County,” February 3, 1968.

<sup>78</sup> *Washington Evening Star* “Students, in Holiday Mood, Pick Sides in Strike,” February 2, 1968, C1 MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 11.

<sup>79</sup> *Washington Evening Star*, “Teachers Strike Schools in Montgomery Over Pay,” February 2, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 14.

teachers had not reported for work.<sup>80</sup> A visibly shocked Elseroad noted “it is difficult for me to believe teachers would strike because of salaries and working conditions in Montgomery County.”<sup>81</sup> Elseroad’s disbelief was countered by what one teacher told WRC-TV 4’s Glenn Rinker: “we just want to maintain human dignity while working in the most affluent suburb in the nation.”<sup>82</sup> An English teacher told the *Washington Evening Star* that she was striking because persons with commensurate education in other fields were better paid.<sup>83</sup> Carolyn Hackett, a sociology teacher appeared on WMAL-TV 7, asking “you see the homes around here? There’s not very many of us who can afford to live in the area where we teach.”<sup>84</sup> Eberly spoke for many teachers when he commented “teachers are doing something they feel is distasteful but it is something that’s got to be done.”<sup>85</sup>

In addition to money, which everyone – teachers, the administration, and especially the media – continued to emphasize as the primary cause of the dispute, teachers also tried to tell reporters about their other concerns, including the differentiated pay scale and the general feeling of disrespect from the

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<sup>80</sup> Because of the chaos of the day, an accurate account of the number of teachers who stayed away is impossible to come by, but the *Post* confirmed what Eberly and Elseroad stated by saying that “only 30 to 50 per cent” of staff crossed picket lines. *Washington Post*, “Teachers’ Strike in County,” February 3, 1968, A1.

<sup>81</sup> *Washington Post*, “No School Monday in County,” February 3, 1968.

<sup>82</sup> Transcript of WRC-TV4’s 7pm broadcast, Friday, February 2, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 17.

<sup>83</sup> *Washington Evening Star* “Students, in Holiday Mood, Pick Sides in Strike,” February 2, 1968, C1. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 11.

<sup>84</sup> Transcript of WMAL-TV’s 11:00pm broadcast, Friday, February 2, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 18. This was echoed the following week by several young teachers, who told a *Washington Post* reporter that they lived in Prince George’s County because they could not afford to live in Montgomery. *Washington Post* “Teachers Show Wide Discontent,” February 6, 1968, B1.

<sup>85</sup> *Washington Post*, “Teachers’ Strike on in County,” February 3, 1968, A1.

administration.<sup>86</sup> One teacher commented “sure, we think salaries are too low. And we think that the richest county in the country can and should pay more. But that isn’t what’s really bugging us. What drove us out onto the picket line is the second-class citizen treatment we’ve gotten for years.”<sup>87</sup> Other teachers commented that their dissatisfaction stemmed from a perception that the entire school system had “gone downhill” in recent years. “Classes are getting larger, the books are not as good,” said one. “The quality of education is bothering me.” This was the key message that teachers hoped would resonate in the minds of the public. Teachers were experts in teaching and learning, and they wanted more input in how the schools were run. Nancy Shaffer, a teacher at Oakdale Elementary School commented, “if we can’t negotiate salary, we can’t negotiate anything... we want a voice in what’s being done in Montgomery County Schools.”<sup>88</sup>

The MCFT publicly stated that its membership would honor the MCEA picket line, but leaders of the union believed that MCEA was using the strike too hastily and cavalierly.<sup>89</sup> The night before the strike, the MCFT Executive Committee contacted the MCEA Executive Committee promising to honor the picket lines and requesting a meeting; the telegram was never acknowledged. On the day the strike began, the MCFT sent a communication directly to Elseroad and the Board of Education,

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<sup>86</sup> *Washington Post*, “Teachers’ Strike on in County,” February 3, 1968, A1.

<sup>87</sup> *Montgomery County Sentinel*, “They’re Talking About ‘Identity,’” February 8, 1968, A1.

<sup>88</sup> *Washington Post* “Teachers Show Wide Discontent,” February 6, 1968, B1. Ellen Hoffman, a *Post* reporter, interviewed about twenty teachers on the picket lines and included their quoted responses in a larger piece about the issues involved in the strike.

<sup>89</sup> MCFT had around 400 members at the time, and they did honor the picket lines. However, as some media outlets followed up on the story that MCEA was striking in part to ward off a challenge from MCFT, Federation President William Hughes did note that “this strike has saved MCEA from extinction,” and noted “MCEA is strictly militancy for the sake of militancy. A disagreement over \$250 on the base pay scale is not a strike issue.” *Washington Sunday Star*, February 4, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 34.

expressing willingness to discuss teacher issues with the Board; this offer was declined.<sup>90</sup> Although media coverage of the strike mentioned the presence of MCFT and the possibility that it had helped spur teachers to militancy, neither the association nor the administration deemed the union worthy of consultation or consideration when it came to resolving the impasse. The MCFT had been ignored by the MCEA and school officials since its formation three years prior, and loyal unionists could do little more than go out of their way to identify themselves as members of the union, and not the association, when interviewed by the media on the picket lines.

Not everyone was enthusiastic about what was happening. Allen Harrison, a biology teacher at Walter Johnson High, said “I’ve been with the County 16 years and it’s been good to me. Maybe I’m older than some of these kids. I’m easier to satisfy than they are.”<sup>91</sup> Harrison, by referring to younger teachers as “kids,” drew attention to the fact that the militant stance was prompted by changing demographics among the ranks of teachers. Some teachers, like Elsie Wetzel McIntire, resigned from MCEA because they believed the strike to be immoral, unprofessional, and illegal.<sup>92</sup> Jack Bledsoe, an art teacher, said he did not believe teachers should strike, and noted “the strikers say the issue is not just money but other things. No one has told me

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<sup>90</sup> Meeting minutes, general membership meeting of the MCFT, February 4, 1968, 1. MCFT Archives, personal collection of Bill Welsh.

<sup>91</sup> *Washington Post*, “Teachers’ Strike on in County,” February 3, 1968, A1.

<sup>92</sup> McIntire submitted her resignation to MCEA and sent a copy of the letter to a local paper, which reprinted it in full; “immoral, unprofessional, and illegal” is a direct quote. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, “More Letters,” February 15, 1968, A5.

what those other things are.”<sup>93</sup> Teachers expressing this viewpoint were especially troubling for MCEA’s leadership because if some rank-and-file teachers were not sure what, besides money, was at stake than it seemed even more unlikely that laypeople would appreciate MCEA’s larger goals of professional treatment and increased respect for teacher concerns.

Alberta French, a black teacher who began her career at the all-black Carver High School during the segregation era and was nearing retirement, refused to strike because she felt it would be a disservice to her students, a sentiment echoed by a *Washington Post* editorial printed on Monday, February 5<sup>th</sup>, that noted “whatever the merits of a teacher strike, schoolchildren are its victims. They lose what can never be restored to them—time and learning opportunities in the fleeting period of their youth.”<sup>94</sup> Other teachers also worried about being seen as abandoning the children in the community, and as teachers made the personal decision about whether to strike or not friendships became strained.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> *Washington Star*, “Teacher Union and Elseroad Meet on Strike,” February 5, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 42. Bledsoe confirmed this sentiment during an oral history interview, 11/2/08, transcript in possession of author.

<sup>94</sup> Oral history interview with Alberta French, 7/6/2007, transcript in possession of author. *Washington Post*, “Truancy,” February 5, 1968, A12. Jack Bledsoe also considered the strike to be a disservice to the children, oral history interview, 11/2/08, transcript in possession of author.

<sup>95</sup> In 1999-2000, Rebecca Regan-Sachs, a student at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School conducted an extensive “social history” of her high school, recording several oral histories and collecting materials about the history of her school. In her section on the teacher strike, she cites four teachers who objected to striking because of an obligation to students, along with five others who considered the strike to be of vital importance. Regan-Sachs’ research can be found on B-CC’s website, see <http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/schools/bcchs/aboutbcc/profile/history.html#The%20Montgomery%20County%20Teachers%20Strike>. In addition, Hank Heller, a teacher and member of MCEA, and Bill Offutt, a member of the Salary Advisory Committee, both recalled that the strike broke up friendships and lingered in the minds of teachers, administrators, and community members for some time – “at least a decade,” according to Heller. Oral history interviews with Hank Heller, 10/12/07, and William Offutt, 8/30/07, transcripts in possession of author.



Within the community there was a similar division, with some residents supporting the teachers and others disapproving of their behavior.<sup>96</sup> “The teachers of Montgomery County, Maryland, have set a wonderful example for their children: if at first you don’t succeed, quit!” fumed a letter to the editor in the *Washington Post*. Another letter-writer scoffed at the idea that teachers were striking in a quest for more respect, noting “how can anyone, student or otherwise, have respect for those who do not fulfill the obligations they accepted when they took a job to teach?”<sup>97</sup> Martha Yeagel, a parent of several children in the system, argued that the striking teachers should be fired for their “unreasonable and irresponsible action in abandoning their pupils.”<sup>98</sup> One of those pupils, Ann Slone, a junior at Sherwood High School, felt as though the strike was “a personal disappointment, a letdown, a broken trust.”<sup>99</sup>

A group of church leaders sent a telegram to MCEA asking them “not to let postures harden” and requested that they call off the strike.<sup>100</sup> Don Roberts, the chairman of the county Republicans, indicated he thought the Board’s offer was fair and hoped that “our kids are not being used as pawns” as part of a struggle between

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<sup>96</sup> On February 8, the *Montgomery County Sentinel* covered the ongoing strike extensively. Letters to the editor expressed both support and opposition to the teachers. Also, an unsigned editorial expressed support while Barney Walsh, a columnist, expressed opposition. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, February 8, 1968, A8-9. A week later, in her letter resigning from MCEA, teacher Elsie Wetzel McIntire referred to a “public consensus that the procedures followed demonstrated the irresponsibility and immaturity of MCEA leadership.” While this was only one woman’s opinion on a perceived “consensus,” McIntire’s letter is detailed and thoughtful and not prone to hyperbole; it seems at least possible that her interpretation of public opinion regarding the strike was a reasonable one. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, “More Letters,” February 15, 1968, A5.

<sup>97</sup> *Washington Post*, “Letters to the Editor,” February 8, 1968, A20.

<sup>98</sup> *Montgomery County Sentinel*, “More Letters,” February 15, 1968, A5.

<sup>99</sup> *Washington Star*, “Letters to the Editor,” February 7, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 65.

<sup>100</sup> *Washington Daily News*, February 5, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 43.

the MCFT and the MCEA. He also indicated that “now is not the time for teachers to make a great leap forward,” and pointed out that tax increases were undesirable, especially with federal taxes increasing in order to pay for the Vietnam War.<sup>101</sup> The Allied Civic Group, a federation of around 50 community organizations that had led the push against the County Council’s tax proposal in December, condemned the strike and urged the School Board to “uphold the law” – implying that the Board ought to get an injunction to force teachers back into the classroom.<sup>102</sup> Silver Spring resident J.E. Watkins agreed: “Those teachers who struck must now be considered as guilty of a criminal act since they knowingly and willingly broke the law and refused to provide the services specified in their present contract. Even the United Automobile Workers did not call a strike last fall until after their contract had expired.”<sup>103</sup>

Several Board members said that the strike was illegal, but Elseroad wanted to try one last round of negotiation before engaging the courts.<sup>104</sup> Representatives from MCEA and the administration met for several hours over the weekend, and, still hoping for an amicable resolution, Elseroad called a “professional day” for Monday,

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<sup>101</sup> *Washington Post*, “Talks Set Today in Teacher Strike,” February 5, 1968, A1.

<sup>102</sup> *Washington Post*, “Talks Set Today in Teacher Strike,” February 5, 1968, A1.

<sup>103</sup> *Washington Star*, “Letters to the Editor,” February 7, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 65.

<sup>104</sup> Elseroad’s initial hesitancy to involve the courts was not shared by everyone in the county. The School Board’s attorney advised the Board that the strike was “definitely illegal,” and an editorial in the *Washington Star* urged the Board to seek a court injunction immediately to end the strike. *Washington Star* editorial, “Montgomery Teachers,” February 4, 1968; *Washington Star*, “Board Will Meet Today Over Teacher’s Strike,” February 4, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 31-32. Elseroad’s hope to resolve the strike without involving the courts is mentioned in *Washington Post*, “2 Strike Adversaries Really Quite Alike,” February 11, 1968, D1.

February 5, closing schools for students but requiring teachers to report for work.<sup>105</sup> Eberly sent a memorandum to his membership on Sunday, conveying guarded optimism in the ongoing negotiations but urging teachers not to report to their classrooms for the professional day.<sup>106</sup> He noted that some teachers had crossed the picket lines on Friday because they felt an obligation to their students, but that “there is no such obligation Monday” because of the Superintendent’s decision to call a professional day.<sup>107</sup>

Schools were closed to students on Monday as the two sides continued to meet in marathon sessions.<sup>108</sup> More than half the teachers resumed their picket lines, and others simply remained at home, but a fair number reported for work. Elseroad called another professional day on Tuesday, and the teachers who came to school spent the day grading papers or preparing future lessons. Late in the day on Tuesday, February 6, the Board upped its offer on starting salary to \$632.5/month but included a no-strike clause in the contract; the Delegate Assembly of MCEA met at midnight and rejected the deal.<sup>109</sup> As the Assembly was meeting, the Board convened a special

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<sup>105</sup> One media account noted that Elseroad designated Monday, February 5<sup>th</sup> a “snow day,” although this seems incorrect, as on a snow day teachers would be allowed to remain out with pay, while in this particular instance teachers who did not report for work were docked pay. *Washington Daily News*, February 5, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 43.

<sup>106</sup> The memo sent by Eberly is in the MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 30.

<sup>107</sup> *Washington Star*, “Teacher Union and Elseroad Meet on Strike,” February 5, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 42.

<sup>108</sup> Media reports indicated “around the clock” negotiating sessions, lasting as long as 11 hours at a stretch before a break for a meal. *Washington Star*, “School Strike Talks Pressed in Montgomery,” February 6, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 53.

<sup>109</sup> *Washington Post*, “Teacher Mass Meeting Set in Strike,” February 8, 1968, A1. At 4:30pm on Tuesday, February 6, the two sides officially began “formal” negotiations, at which time the Board made its new offer to MCEA. *Washington Daily News*, February 6, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 52. Meeting minutes, Montgomery County Education Association Delegate

session and resolved to get a court injunction to end the strike.<sup>110</sup> The injunction to end the strike was quickly issued by County Judge Irving Levine, although he deleted portions of the Board's suggested wording that would have required teachers to return to work.<sup>111</sup> An MCEA spokesman noted that the injunction would not take effect until it was served to the MCEA leaders named, including Eberly, Vice Presidents Richard Abbel and Donald Reddick, Secretary Dorothy Stackhouse and Treasurer Thomas Hickman, and proclaimed that the strike was still on. Eberly and the other officers slipped across the Potomac River to a Holiday Inn in Arlington, Virginia, late Tuesday evening to avoid being served with the injunction.<sup>112</sup> A television reporter from channel 9 was tipped off regarding their location and filmed a short interview with Eberly, infuriating Judge Levine.<sup>113</sup>

Schools remained closed to students on Wednesday, February 7, but Elseroad urged teachers to report for work; and a shade fewer than half of the county's teachers heeded the call. About 1,500 striking teachers picketed the School Board headquarters in Rockville to keep pressure on the administration. Negotiations between MCEA and the School Board did not resume as MCEA leadership remained in Virginia; Judge Levine ordered his injunction be served to MCEA's legal counsel, Victor Crawford, who had remained in Montgomery County. The judge angrily

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Assembly, Special Meeting, 12:37am February 7, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 61.

<sup>110</sup> Meeting minutes, Montgomery County Board of Education, February 6, 1968, 1. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 50.

<sup>111</sup> *Washington Post*, "Teacher Walkout Enjoined," February 7, 1968, A1. A copy of the judge's order is in the MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 73-87.

<sup>112</sup> *Washington Post*, "Teacher Mass Meeting Set in Strike," February 8, 1968, A1.

<sup>113</sup> Oral history interview with David Eberly, 4/24/07, transcript in possession of author.

rebuked MCEA leadership for their “contemptuous” behavior in absconding to Virginia and warned teachers that they faced possible jail time if they continued their strike.<sup>114</sup> Eberly and his “Gaithersburg Gang,” through Crawford, pledged their willingness to comply with the judge’s order but then called a five-and-a-half hour general membership meeting at Shady Grove during the school day on Thursday, February 8.<sup>115</sup>

At the meeting, teachers in attendance supported the Delegate Assembly’s Tuesday night decision and voted to reject the Board’s latest offer by a vote of 2,848 to 1,839. Teachers took the stage and related their anger, feeling as though even after a week of striking the teachers were being “dictated to” and treated disrespectfully by Elseroad and the Board of Education. The Board’s inclusion of a no-strike clause in their salary offer was particularly disliked among the teachers, because it meant that if the County Council failed to appropriate enough money to fulfill the agreed-upon salary, the teachers would have no recourse.<sup>116</sup> Anticipating that the judge might deem additional membership meetings called by MCEA a violation of his order, the National Education Association called its own meeting for Friday, February 9; the

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<sup>114</sup> The judge once again went of his way to specify that he could not order the teachers to return to work, which he believed would violate the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which prohibits involuntary servitude. His injunction was only to prevent members from striking, not to compel them to return to work. The teachers who stayed out could be docked pay. *Washington Post*, “Pact Rejected by Teachers; Schools Open,” February 9, 1968, A1.

<sup>115</sup> Some teachers felt as though the meeting at Shady Grove was itself a violation of the judge’s order, and they angrily expressed their opposition to the “illegal and arrogant stand of the leadership of all three professional organizations,” referring to MCEA, MSTA, and NEA. Telegram signed by 14 teachers sent to the President of MSTA, February 8, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 72.

<sup>116</sup> *Washington Post*, “Pact Rejected by Teachers; Schools Open,” February 9, 1968, A1.

NEA was not named in the injunction and nearly every MCEA member was also a member of the national association.<sup>117</sup>

Schools were finally re-opened for children on Friday, February 9. Around half of the county's teachers reported for work, and about three-quarters of the students were in classrooms. Classes were covered by substitute teachers, parents, and administrators, but most schools closed early and it was far from a 'normal' school day.<sup>118</sup> Many teachers simply stayed home, but around 1,800 attended the NEA's meeting at the Shady Grove Theater. Brauilo Alonso, the president of the NEA, returned to the county to attend the meeting and told the crowd that "the NEA pledges all of our resources to help you in this struggle."<sup>119</sup> The hope that having the NEA sponsor the meeting would not violate Judge Levine's order proved futile, as Levine ordered both MCEA and the NEA to show cause why they should not be held in contempt for flouting his order not to engage in striking activities by holding their meetings on Thursday and Friday.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> *Washington Post*, "Pact Rejected by Teachers; Schools Open," February 9, 1968, A1. According to the *Post*, "all but about 40" members of MCEA were also members of the NEA, see *Washington Post* "Mediator Weighed in Strike," February 10, 1968, A1.

<sup>118</sup> One substitute was Barney Welsh, a columnist for a local newspaper, who wrote about his experience the following week. He had high praise for the students, and also commented that "I am convinced that the most underpaid professional people in the world are school teachers," although he also lamented that people are seldom paid what they are worth. He then expressed his displeasure at the high salary of Jackie Gleason. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, "The Lesson Learned," February 15, 1968, A4.

<sup>119</sup> *Washington Post* "Mediator Weighed in Strike," February 10, 1968, A1.

<sup>120</sup> The charge that the judge's injunction had been violated named two people by name, including Jim Politis, because they identified themselves on the MCEA automated recording announcing the NEA meeting which was played as an answering machine message at MCEA headquarters. See Oral History interview with Jim Politis, 5/16/08, transcript in possession of author. The judge's order was delivered by a county sheriff at the Shady Grove Theater; he was booed loudly by the teachers in attendance. *Washington Post* "Mediator Weighed in Strike," February 10, 1968, A1.

Later that evening, state Superintendent of Schools James Sensebaugh suggested that the Maryland State Board of Education mediate the ongoing dispute.<sup>121</sup> The two sides met with state officials in an all-day negotiating session on Saturday, February 10, and reached a tentative agreement by late evening. The Board agreed to raise the starting salary to \$634/month, making Montgomery County's starting salary the highest in the Washington, D.C. area. This was more than double the increase from \$588/month to \$610/month originally agreed to in November of 1967, but only \$9 per month more than the \$625 Elseroad offered just before the strike. The agreement included a "no reprisals" clause to prevent the Board from taking disciplinary action against teachers who went on strike.<sup>122</sup> Eberly called the agreement "an honorable settlement" that represented "an achievement for the teachers of Montgomery County that was worth the effort and sacrifice that were made by thousands of people." He told the teachers to report for work on Monday, February 12, and asked members of the Delegate Assembly to poll the teachers at their schools for their opinion on the proposed agreement.<sup>123</sup>

School officials reported that ninety-seven percent of the professional staff reported for work on Monday morning, with over ninety percent of students in

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<sup>121</sup> MCEA Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, February 9, 1968, 1. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 122.

<sup>122</sup> The differentiated pay scale that paid teachers more for assuming additional responsibilities was not included in the agreement; school officials agreed to study it further before moving ahead.

<sup>123</sup> *Washington Post* "Teachers Call Off Strike," February 12, 1968, A1. Also see *Montgomery County Sentinel*, "Transit Plan Okayed; Teachers' Strike Ends," February 15, 1968, A1; Also see meeting minutes, MCEA Delegate Assembly, Special Meeting, February 11, 1968, 1-4. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, p. 152-15.

attendance.<sup>124</sup> At 8pm that evening, the Delegate Assembly met and voted to approve the agreement; the School Board officially adopted the agreement the following evening.<sup>125</sup> Two Board members voted against the agreement, arguing that it would force significant cutbacks in other areas.<sup>126</sup> The new agreement amounted to a \$2.7 million dollar increase over the operating budget that Elseroad had initially developed in January. School officials noted that about \$1 million of the new money committed to teachers would be diverted from other areas within the existing budget, but that about \$1.6 million would simply have to be added onto the budget request that the Board would send to the County Council.<sup>127</sup> Among the projects cut to find the additional \$1 million for teachers were funds earmarked for computer and television investments, purchases of additional library books, and as well as potential new hires, both of teachers (which might have reduced class sizes) and aides and lunchroom staff (which might have relieved teachers of administrative duties like lunchroom supervision).<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> *Washington Post*, "County Teachers Vote on Pay Offer," February 13, 1968, A1.

<sup>125</sup> MCEA Delegate Assembly Meeting Minutes, Special Meeting, February 12, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 165. Board of Education Meeting Minutes, February 13, 1968, 13-15. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 187-190.

<sup>126</sup> *Washington Post*, "School Board Cuts Million From Budget," February 14, 1968, C1.

<sup>127</sup> *Washington Post* "Teachers Call Off Strike," February 12, 1968, A1.

<sup>128</sup> *Washington Post* "Teachers Call Off Strike," February 12, 1968, A1; also see *Montgomery County Sentinel*, "Transit Plan Okayed; Teachers' Strike Ends," February 15, 1968, A1. Another major area of cost savings was a program to put teachers on a 12-month schedule, as opposed to the traditional 10-month. This program had not drawn much attention during the initial negotiating sessions in the fall of 1967, because it had been instituted years before and its continuation was uncontroversial. Under the program, teachers could work over the summer on curriculum development and teaching summer school classes and receive two additional months of pay at their regular salary. The Board initially planned to make this program available to 30 percent of the county's teachers; after the strike, that was reduced to 25 percent, saving the board about a half a million dollars. Also, the Board saved about \$600,000 during the strike itself, since teachers were docked pay for days missed.



The MCFT fumed about the resolution of the strike. William Hughes, President of the union, was bewildered by the strike, calling it “an odd animal” and labeling the eventual solution a “we-quit package.”<sup>129</sup> Hughes and other MCFT members had more experience thinking about the teacher/administrator relationship as akin to labor/management, and it seems likely that they would not have decided to deploy the strike tactic so cavalierly. Elseroad’s decision to designate the days during the strike as professional days was “simply a device to reward people to break the strike,” when, in Hughes’ opinion, all teachers should have been granted emergency pay as compensation for the emergency closing situation. He noted that “teachers are worse off now because they lost more in pay while they were on strike than they gained in base salary.” The MCFT also complained about the cuts the Board made from other areas in the school budget to meet the salary demands, alleging that these were actually a “form of reprisal... without the slightest regard for the quality of the instructional program.”<sup>130</sup>

Hughes’ point was potentially damaging from a public relations perspective. The news that the School Board was cutting at least \$1 million from other educational programs, a figure which could potentially grow after the County Council determined the final operating budget, made it seem as though financial gains for teachers were coming at the expense of other expenditures. This was precisely what the MCCPTA had been able to avoid by lobbying for across-the-board spending increases that linked increases in teacher salaries with calls for simultaneous investments elsewhere.

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<sup>129</sup> *Washington Star*, “Teachers Okay Pay Package in Montgomery,” February 13, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 193-194.

<sup>130</sup> *Montgomery County Sentinel*, “Transit Plan Okayed; Teachers’ Strike Ends,” February 15, 1968, A1.

By taking the drastic action of striking in an effort to gain what amounted to \$9 more per month for teachers in starting salary, and having school officials complain publicly that the extra money would be diverted from other areas, the strike helped to codify the notion that teachers were primarily concerned about lining their pockets.

Judge Levine was also angry, both at MCEA leaders for their trip across the Potomac and at the NEA for holding its mass meeting at Shady Grove. On February 15, Levine found NEA official Gary Watts guilty of contempt and imposed a suspended three-day jail sentence. Both the NEA and MCEA as organizations were spared contempt charges “simply because of the strict test of burden of proof,” and Levine admonished the organizations for violating his injunction. The NEA meeting was well-enough attended, Levine argued, to “continue the strike for almost another day—one more day of lawlessness in this county, one more day of lawlessness exhibited to 117,000 pupils.” Indeed, imposing upon the students “the almost incredible sight of these many school teachers demonstrating defiance of the law” was, in Levine’s eyes, as serious a transgression as the lawbreaking itself.<sup>131</sup> This was another troubling legacy of the strike for the MCEA and the county’s teachers. Since the main “goal” of the MCEA was perceived by the public to be a pay increase, it tested the patience of county residents to believe that a few extra dollars warranted reckless and illegal behavior.

Some observers thought the NEA-sponsored meeting on Friday, February 9<sup>th</sup> represented more than simply an effort to evade the judge’s injunction. Although the NEA had not been involved in the crucial events in November and early December which precipitated the standoff between MCEA and the School Board, it certainly

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<sup>131</sup> *Washington Post* “2 Guilty in Contempt in Strike by Teachers,” February 16, 1968, B1.

seemed likely that NEA officials recognized ways that the Montgomery County situation could be used to their advantage.<sup>132</sup> Since AFT locals, like the MCFT, were making gains in other suburban communities, attracting national attention to a strike in an affluent suburb bordering Washington, D.C., allowed the NEA to demonstrate to other local affiliates across the country that the association was willing to go to great lengths to fight for teachers.<sup>133</sup> Braulio Alonso's two appearances in Montgomery County increased the national exposure of the Montgomery County strike, and it seems possible that Alonso and other NEA officials gained confidence from the experience in Montgomery County to push ahead with a statewide strike of teachers in Florida later in the spring of 1968.<sup>134</sup>

The teacher strike in Montgomery also attracted the attention of the state association, the Maryland State Teachers Association, because the Maryland General Assembly in Annapolis was in session that February.<sup>135</sup> The MSTA lobbied state

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<sup>132</sup> Although the presence of both NEA officials and representatives from the state-level group, the Maryland State Teachers Association, were active in supporting the striking activities, the fact remains that Eberly personally asked for their assistance, both as consultants in December and January and then to provide material assistance and to plan strategy once the strike started. His telegram, sent on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, to the MSTA was met with an enthusiastic response from MSTA officials, see MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 36-37.

<sup>133</sup> *Washington Star*, February 11, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 164. "Observers also see an NEA affiliate strike in a prestigious suburban school district like Montgomery County as a formidable example to teachers all over the country that militancy is becoming respectable." Also see *Washington Post* "NEA Takes Reins of Strike," February 10, 1968, C1.

<sup>134</sup> This strike in Florida did not turn out as well as Alonso might have hoped. James Sullivan, in an article about the teacher walkout in Florida in 1968, argues that the strike failed in large part because the citizens of Florida were preoccupied with the Vietnam War and associated the striking teachers to the anti-war protesters who were seen by many Floridians as unpatriotic. For Sullivan, this strike and the reaction to it were emblematic of the beginning of a pendulum swing towards political conservatism, led by sunbelt states like Florida, which would dominate American politics for the next few decades. James Sullivan "The Florida Teacher Walkout in the Political Transition of 1968" in *Southern Labor in Transition, 1940-1995* (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 206.

<sup>135</sup> *Washington Star*, "County Delegates Push To Ban Teacher Strikes," February 11, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 158.

legislators to draft new bills that for the first time compelled local Boards to enter into legally-binding negotiations with teacher organizations. All of these bills contained explicit language making teacher strikes illegal and punished any organization that struck with a two-year ban on representing teachers.<sup>136</sup> The MSTA opted to support the bills, even with the strict no-strike language, because its leadership considered the establishment of legally-binding negotiations to be a significant victory for teachers.<sup>137</sup>

The bill that eventually passed the legislature in March, the Teacher Negotiations Act, was supported by the MSTA and teacher organizations in all 24 counties in Maryland, including the MCEA.<sup>138</sup> In order to determine what organization would represent the teachers in a particular county, the law specified that teachers could hold secret-ballot elections after June 1, 1968. In order to be eligible for consideration in such an election an organization had to certify membership of at least 10 percent of a school system's teachers, and in Montgomery County that meant certifying about 600 members. MCEA passed that threshold easily, but even after

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<sup>136</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, "Striking Montgomery Teachers Vote Today," February 8, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 106.

<sup>137</sup> Not everyone agreed. The Baltimore Teachers Union, an AFT affiliate, slammed the bill as "a fraud perpetrated on all teachers in the state of Maryland" because of the no-strike clause. *Baltimore Sun*, "Teacher Union Urges Veto of Bargaining Measure," March 28, 1968, C8.

<sup>138</sup> Another potential problem with the bill was the inclusion of language that specified that local County Councils retained the ultimate right to set county budgets; this seemed destined to produce legal wrangling when a Council refused to fully fund a legally-negotiated contract. The teachers association in Ann Arundel county protested, later in the summer of 1968, when the Ann Arundel County Council passed a final budget that made cuts to the budget negotiated between the Ann Arundel School Board and the Teachers Association of Ann Arundel County. The State Board of Education ruled that the final budgetary authority resided with the local political authority, which would seem to weaken the impact of the Teacher Negotiations Act, since the negotiated contracts could be altered by the political authority. The State Board commented that the Act still provided "moral support" and a form of "political power" for teachers because a county council would have to face the voters if they made cuts to a negotiated budget. *Baltimore Sun* "Teacher-Pay Pacts Ruled Not Binding," October 31, 1968, C20.

gaining some members during the strike the MCFT had only about 400 teachers in the spring of 1968 and needed to attract new members in order to force an election.<sup>139</sup>

The MCFT was able to convince one MCEA member who had been a high-profile leader during the strike, a teacher named Ray Kent, to join the union. Kent wrote an open letter to teachers in the county urging other teachers to follow his lead, arguing that it was necessary to have a vibrant alternative to the MCEA in order to ensure the association maintained its strong stance in favor of securing gains for teachers.<sup>140</sup> But by June 1, the MCFT was unable to convince enough teachers to join their organization, and so by default the MCEA, with a documented 4,391 of the county's 6,200 teachers as certified members, was assured of official recognition as the sole bargaining agent for the county's teachers.<sup>141</sup>

However, a significant number of teachers and administrators left the association after the strike to express their displeasure about the radical action taken

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<sup>139</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, "House Passes Teacher Bill," March 17, 1968, 16.

<sup>140</sup> Kent had spoken passionately at the general meetings at the Shady Grove Theater, and did not spare the rhetoric. In his open letter to teachers, he urged them to keep the pressure on, charging the Board with "countless betrayals of teachers' trust," and arguing that "this rape of our children's minds and futures must not be continued." *Montgomery County Sentinel*, "Teacher Election Issues are Boiling," May 29, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 3, 173. Also see *Washington Post* "Md. Teachers Elect in June," May 25, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 3, 167. Notably, Kent actually maintained his membership in MCEA even as he elected to join the MCFT, and there was speculation that others maintained dual membership in both the association and the union.

<sup>141</sup> Those figures differed slightly from figures cited earlier in this chapter. The discrepancy is due to some members joining or leaving the association during the school year, and also to the fact that newspapers are not consistent when they cite membership numbers – sometimes they specify *teachers* while other times they just say *professional employees*, which could include administrators. *Washington Post* "Education Association Wins Recognition in Montgomery," June 6, 1968, D14. Because the union was unable to certify 10%, MCEA simply had to request that the Board recognize it as the sole bargaining representative. As the only organization with 10% of the staff as members, MCEA was the only option for the Board to consider, and the formal recognition which came a few weeks later was a mere formality. Board of Education, Meeting Minutes, June 11, 1968, 6. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 3, 193.

by Eberly and the other leaders.<sup>142</sup> Eberly claimed that the majority of defectors were principals and other administrators, but conceded that some teachers also left. In 1969, the year after the strike, MCEA represented only 60% of eligible professional staff (teachers and administrators); in 1961 91% of eligible staff had belonged.<sup>143</sup> Meanwhile, to the great disappointment of union leaders, the MCFT did not gain very many members after the strike and in the following years the union faded into near-obscurity. It seemed that the display of militancy had alienated a fair number of teachers, a sentiment that Eberly hoped was not shared by many members of the general public.

The letters “MCEA,” which as recently as February 1 were relatively unknown among the general population in Montgomery County, had burst into the collective consciousness. A local reporter noted that “opinions either damning or praising the teachers’ organization were one’s for the taking” after the strike ended, as opposed to before the strike, when most citizens had neither a positive nor negative opinion of the association. Eberly and other MCEA leaders hoped that, in addition to the base salary increase and other negotiated points in the agreement, they had also gained something more intangible: the attention and respect of the community.

Eberly commented that “teachers now feel they can negotiate from a point of strength

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<sup>142</sup> *Washington Post*, “Montgomery Teacher Unit Decreases,” October 25, 1968, B1.

<sup>143</sup> Between 1961 and 1972, the percentage of staff members eligible for MCEA membership who actually joined dropped from 92% to 72%. The most significant drop occurred in 1969, the year after the strike, when only 60% of eligible professionals were members of the association. MCEA regained some members in the following years, and it’s unclear how much of the dropoff was due to administrators and principals withdrawing. Eugene Patrick Moran, “An Historical Study of the Working Relationships Between The Montgomery County Board of Education and the Montgomery County Education Association During The Ten Year Period 1961-1971.” (Doctoral dissertation, The George Washington University, 1973), Appendix D: MCEA Membership, 181. A copy of this dissertation is at the MCEA offices in Rockville, MD.

– that they can speak and be heard.” He considered this to be a major victory emerging from the strike.<sup>144</sup>

But perhaps Eberly was misreading the situation, or was overly optimistic in his assessment that the general public would see the teachers’ ability to negotiate from a point of strength as a positive development. For one thing, although MCEA had tried to point out that there were numerous issues which caused the strike, very often media reports boiled things down to focus on salaries. This was particularly damaging for teachers because for years they had been able to link their own goals to the continued development of an excellent school system. News that salary increases required funds to be diverted from other areas made it seem as though MCEA prioritized financial gains for teachers over the good of the whole system.

By adopting a more militant posture, MCEA members succeeded in securing more gains and power for themselves. Yet that gain in power for MCEA also marked a turning point for teachers in the county, and for the way that teachers were seen by others in the community. Instead of being on the same side as the administration and being seen as putting the children and the good of the schools first, teachers began to be identified with *their own* needs, goals, and ambitions. In the minds of the citizenry the sense that teachers were out for themselves, as opposed to interested in maintaining good schools in the county, became more and more prevalent.<sup>145</sup> Some

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<sup>144</sup> *Montgomery County Sentinel*, “Now That The Strike’s Over... The Teachers.” February 15, 1968, A1.

<sup>145</sup> For example, during the skirmish with Homer Elseroad over the “task forces,” the MCEA position was troubling to some members of the community. Rosemary Hillburg, a member of the Board of Education, said she had received concerned phone calls from citizens. “They (the public) are asking, ‘is the quest for organization power getting in the way of educating our children?’” *Montgomery County Sentinel*, “State Board to Hear Teacher Fight Issue,” August 8, 1968. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 3, 226.

county residents, including members of the MCCPTA, began to see teachers as their opponents, self-interested actors against whom the fight over limited dollars had to be waged, instead of allies alongside whom the pursuit of good schools could be maintained. The strike stirred up passions in the county, prompting accusations and suspicion where none had existed before. Going forward, some citizens would never again perceive teachers to be entirely aligned with parents, taxpayers, and other residents in the pursuit of good schools.<sup>146</sup>

Also, the Committee for Public Schools, which had been founded after the 1962 election to work towards the election of more liberal School Board candidates, found itself caught between the MCEA and the administration. Although the CPS had been founded by some teachers who were interested in taking a more active role in politics, its members included teachers as well as some parents and other citizens. A statement from CPS officials during the strike noted that the CPS “strongly believes in and supports fair salaries for teachers and the constructive participation by teachers in the development of educational programs. At the same time, we believe equally strongly that the offer made by the Board of Education is reasonable under all

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<sup>146</sup> The MCCPTA held an emergency meeting on February 6, 1968, at the Rockville Civic Center, and Elaine Cotlove, a past president, gave an impassioned speech to the attendees. Excerpts from this speech were distributed to MCCPTA members under the heading “Responsible Courses of Action for PTAs.” This document illuminates the “very emotional” issues under discussion, the “tons of misinformation” floating in the atmosphere, and the accusatory tendencies which were prevalent: “He’s a liar,” “don’t believe anything they say,” “if not for them, it never would have happened,” are some of the turns of phrase that Cotlove places in quotes to emphasize how they stand in for the attitudes being expressed by citizens. Cotlove urged her membership to seek out facts, not innuendo, and to do as much information-gathering as possible before holding coffee klatches and other local meetings to help distribute evidenced-based data and hold fruitful discussions. She points out that “PTA is for kids” and that “it is we who own the schools.” The tone of the document illuminates how passionate many members of the community felt about the issue, and about how the strike divided not only teachers from parents but also parents among themselves depending upon whether they supported the teachers or not. It is obvious that Cotlove is trying to bring about harmony to a very divisive membership, and it seems clear that a pivot was occurring in the minds of many parents regarding their opinion of teachers and their organization. MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 56-57.



the circumstances prevailing this year.” The CPS supported the teachers’ right to express their feelings, but disapproved of the strike, deeming it “inappropriate” and “wholly unjustified.”<sup>147</sup>

The CPS commended Homer Elseroad, whom it believed “conducted these negotiations with scrupulous fairness and consideration for the teachers and the public” and supported the administration’s unwillingness to allow an independent mediator to “usurp the responsibilities of the School Board.” Because the CPS was focused on winning Board elections and electoral politics, its faith was clearly in that elected body to make decisions based on what it considered the public’s will to be. MCEA wanted an independent mediator to resolve disputes, but this was an instance where the teachers’ association wanted something different from others in the community who resisted the notion that a mediator – unelected by and unaccountable to the people – could decide the final contract. It appeared as though MCEA, in its effort to secure what it deemed desirable for teachers, had alienated the leaders of the CPS, who were more focused on producing electoral victories and maintaining that form of local democratic control over the county’s school system.<sup>148</sup>

During the winter of 1969-70, negotiations between MCEA and the Board of Education reached an impasse and an independent arbiter was brought in to broker an agreement.<sup>149</sup> The mediator helped to iron out a deal where teacher salaries were

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<sup>147</sup> Committee for Public Schools newsletter, undated (during the strike, circa February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1968). MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 90-91.

<sup>148</sup> Committee for Public Schools newsletter, undated (during the strike, circa February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1968). MCEA Archives, Rockville, MD, Binder 2, 90-91.

<sup>149</sup> The impasse in the fall of 1969 was resolved in January of 1970. *Washington Post*, “Mediator Picked in Dispute on Schools in Montgomery,” January 11, 1970, 39. Also see MCA, RG

raised about 9.1 percent, but in order to fund this there were cuts made to other areas of the budget, including hiring fewer new teachers and investing less in “program improvement” than in previous years. Some county taxpayers understandably looked askance at the budget, wondering whether taxpayer dollars were going towards educational improvement or simply into the pockets of teachers.<sup>150</sup> Teachers, of course, considered their own compensation to be a vital way of improving the educational atmosphere, but that was not a view shared by everyone. An impasse occurred the following year as well, and after months of haggling with the mediator and Board officials the MCEA team gained another 5 percent pay increase, higher than had been expected.<sup>151</sup>

The annual clash between MCEA and school officials took a toll on the public’s patience. The public nature of these disputes confused and irritated some critics who did not understand how these lengthy and contentious negotiations were a positive development for the education of children in the county. In 1973, teachers in the county favored, by a margin of three to one, a reduction of the length of the school calendar, but seventy percent of the public objected to any shortening of the school year for fears that this would be detrimental to the educational program.<sup>152</sup> In 1974, School Board President Harriet Bernstein noted that the Board and MCEA largely agreed on the salary issues under discussion but there remained “philosophic”

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13: Office of Public Information, Box 2, Tape 44, “Schools,” 11/21/1970; also see MCA, RG 13: Office of Public Information, Box 6, Tape 201, “Employee Negotiations,” 1/18/1974.

<sup>150</sup> *Washington Post* “County School Budget Holds Line on Taxes,” February 10, 1970, C1.

<sup>151</sup> *Washington Post* “Vote for Montgomery Pact, Teachers Group Chief Asks,” February 25, 1971, B3.

<sup>152</sup> MCA, RG 13: Office of Public Information, Box 6, Tape 193 “School Calendar/Survey,” 10/21/1973.

differences between the two sides; she also noted that MCEA was a “vested interest group” with specific goals and aims which benefited the members of that group.<sup>153</sup> Bernstein did not need to go further and state that those goals and aims were not necessarily shared by others in the school system, or by parents and other members in the community.

The strike in February of 1968 was the moment that teachers established themselves as a powerful and distinct activist group involved in educational politics in Montgomery County. Their method of activism, taking to the streets in an illegal and confrontational strike, surprised many in the county who were accustomed to operating within the established channels of public lobbying and electoral participation. The MCEA never employed the strike again, but the effect of the 1968 walkout loomed for decades in the county as a reminder of the collective power that teachers could bring to bear on the school system’s operation. Also, following the strike the MCEA became increasingly involved in electoral politics, adding another perspective to what were already hotly contested School Board elections.<sup>154</sup> This perspective focused on the concerns of teachers and although MCEA tried to link their concerns over salaries and working conditions to the overall good of the school system, that link was not always understood by members of the administration or

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<sup>153</sup> MCA, RG 13: Office of Public Information, Box 6, Tape 201, “Employee Negotiations,” 1/18/1974.

<sup>154</sup> As early as 1969, after David Eberly had moved on to become President of the Maryland State Teacher’s Association, new MCEA President Tom Shugarts contemplated having the MCEA run its own candidates for School Board, or at least raising funds and contributing money to the candidates it endorsed. “I think it’s time the teaching profession realized its political potential,” he commented, noting that this was “not a threat. I hope it will be a promise.” In 1970, the MCEA took the new step of distributing literature to its membership and explicitly recommending that they vote for particular School Board candidates; in subsequent years, the MCEA-produced “Apple Ballot” provided endorsements that the association distributed to members of the public. *Washington Post*, “Teachers Set Political Wage Fight,” October 23, 1969, B1; *Washington Post* “Teacher Unit Backs Citizen Choice Slate,” September 3, 1970, B2.

members of the public. Although the liberal activists in the MCCPTA and the MCEA were more likely to be allies than opponents when it came to fighting for investments in education and progressive educational ideas against conservatives who wanted to cut spending and focus on rote instruction in the fundamentals, this alliance was not guaranteed. The diversion of \$1 million from other programs to teacher salaries as part of the strike resolution was an early example of how gains for teachers could disappoint liberals who wanted more investments in other areas.

Teachers, for better and for worse, solidified their position as an independent educational activist group by striking in 1968. The establishment of professional negotiations secured an important mechanism of political power for teachers to employ in their quest for salaries and benefits that allowed many of them to live and work comfortably in Montgomery County. Teachers may not have been as well-compensated and respected as the lawyers, scientists, and government officials who were their neighbors, but they were able to buy homes and raise families in the affluent and prosperous county where they taught. Teachers could plausibly argue that their professional compensation and autonomy were important signifiers of educational excellence that resonated in the minds of those who observed the county's schools. On the other hand, although many people in the county were sympathetic to the teachers' goals and desires, public airing of the negotiations between MCEA and school officials, which usually focused on salaries and little else, reminded the public that teacher gains came from tax dollars not spent on other areas, or, not kept in taxpayer's pockets. In 1968 the strike was understood by many in simplistic terms as a dispute over money, and going forward that perception would

linger in the minds of some citizens. Teachers would try, as they did in 1968, to connect their own concerns to the good of the entire community; but as was the case in 1968, this often proved difficult, if not impossible, to do.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Unhappy Returns: The 1978 Election Season**

In 1978 the dynamic democratic pluralism characterizing educational politics in Montgomery County produced an extremely contentious election season. The lines between groups of educational activists, including liberals, African-Americans, teachers, and conservatives, hardened as each group focused on specific goals. These goals ranged from program improvements to affirmative action policies to defense of bargaining rights to regulations on taxes and spending; each goal grew out of a particular educational vision promoted by members of associations and organizations formed by members of each group. In some instances there were opportunities for members of different groups to find common cause and work together; in other cases there seemed to be no way to reconcile the disparate interpretations of educational excellence. The electoral results left no one group feeling particularly victorious, and more importantly, the political debates during the summer and fall of 1978 created a widespread sense of dissatisfaction and despair about the public schools.

The 1978 election was the culmination of three decades of educational politics that had become more bitterly contested over time. In addition to occurring at a moment when various activist groups were determined to protect previous victories or regain lost ground, the election took place near the end of a tumultuous decade that brought several significant changes to Montgomery County. The national economic downturn affecting the entire United States during the 1970s forced citizens to cope with a new economic reality, reframing discussions about taxation, public services, and education. Additionally, two demographic changes affected the ongoing efforts to maintain the county's public schools. First, after years of annual increases,

enrollment peaked in 1973 at around 126,000 students and then began a precipitous drop as the baby boom finally tapered off. Second, after years of lobbying and hard work by African American activists and some sympathetic white liberals, the County Council passed a fair housing law in 1968 and an open accommodations act in 1969. For years, blacks had not been able to move into Montgomery County due to various forms of discrimination, and the new laws allowed thousands of black families to move into the county, particularly to the down-county area that bordered Washington D.C.

The arrival of these black families in the down-county area coincided with, and probably helped to accelerate, increased migration within the county. For decades the county had been roughly divided into two regions: the down-county suburban region of towns close to Washington, D.C. and the sparsely populated rural up-county that comprised the upper three-fourths of the county's geographic area. By the early 1970s, the down-county region was densely populated, with small metropolises like Silver Spring, Bethesda, and Takoma Park surrounded by leafy suburban neighborhoods. As the down-county area became more urbanized, developers expanded north into the mid-county, and this region, especially around the county seat of Rockville, attracted thousands of new residents during the 1970s, including many white families who relocated there away from the down-county region where black families from Washington, D.C., were settling.

These demographic shifts posed a significant problem for the administrators of the school system. The racial developments threatened to re-segregate the county's schools while the declining birthrate necessitated schools be closed or

consolidated. Officials were also motivated to make efficient use of physical plants because of the rising cost of heating oil, electricity, and gasoline due to the oil embargo and inflation. The declining number, racial composition, and spatial arrangement of students in the county proved to be dynamic forces that required an ongoing series of evolving policies to address.

Finally, in addition to the economic downturn and demographic transitions, ideological issues also affected educational politics in the 1970s. Early in the decade, physical altercations between black and white high school students prompted school officials to look closely at the experience of black youths in MCPS. Black students had higher dropout rates than whites and expressed feelings of alienation and dissatisfaction with the public schools. Black community leaders demanded a comprehensive series of affirmative action policies to focus on the educational needs of black youths. These policies, called the Action Steps, included curricular offerings, hiring and professional development policies, discipline and behavioral guidelines, and other initiatives.

If these efforts resembled educational affirmative action policies implemented elsewhere in the United States during the 1970s, so too did the taxpayer's revolt that occurred in Montgomery County in 1978. Following the passage of Proposition 13 in California that spring, economic conservative activists upset about tax increases and the growth of the public sector in Montgomery seized the moment and placed a tax-cap measure on the November ballot. Concurrently, educational conservatives who frowned on experimental curricula and pedagogy like "open" classrooms, nontraditional subjects, and lax discipline in the schools turned their sights on the



School Board election. Some of these conservatives also criticized the Action Steps for privileging black educational needs over that of white students. However, unlike the situation in 1962, when educational and economic conservatives worked together to engineer an electoral victory, in 1978 the economic conservatives attempting to pass the tax-cap measure and the educational conservatives running for seats on the School Board ran separate campaigns.

Everything culminated during the summer and fall of 1978. The policies created by school officials during the previous years to address the declining school aged-population, the physical location of black and white students, and concerns about the educational experience of black students were all important issues in the campaign for four seats on the School Board. Economic conservatives placed a ballot initiative with the acronym TRIM (Tax Relief In Montgomery) on the November ballot to lower the property tax rate significantly and make future tax increases difficult to achieve. Because the property tax a major source of the schools budget, everyone realized that TRIM would greatly affect the future of the public schools were it to pass. All of the educational activist groups – representing liberals, conservatives, teachers, and African-Americans – had a vested interest in the Board race and TRIM ballot measure. They all worked hard to ensure that their particular educational vision would prevail. These federations and associations were well-organized and had learned lessons from previous victories and defeats. The stakes seemed particularly high because of the lingering economic stagnation, the evangelical fervor with which TRIM captured the attention of many county residents,

and the gnawing issue of race relations that affected many of the reforms implemented by school officials in the previous decade.

The 1970s were a particularly tumultuous decade in American history, and schools in particular attracted national attention because of the unfinished business of racial integration. In some respects, desegregation and integration had distinct meanings. Desegregation was what occurred in Montgomery County during the late 1950s, a logistical process of dismantling the black school system and adding black students to the white system. The white liberals in Montgomery County, like white liberals across the country, believed that simply admitting black students to the previously all-white system would guarantee blacks an equal educational opportunity. Desegregation, in other words, was a logistical and concrete task that could be accomplished, at least on paper, as discriminatory policies outlining segregation were eradicated. But integration was something different and more difficult to achieve, involving the creation and maintenance of a new school system that truly reflected the educational visions of both black and white people, potentially serving as a mechanism for greater racial tolerance and equality. Unlike desegregation, integration was an ongoing and probably unending series of steps toward a noble, but elusive, goal of racial harmony in American society. Across the nation, blacks and whites struggled with integration; court-ordered busing, the neighborhood schools movement in urban areas, and pushes for Black Studies curricula were examples of efforts to remake public school systems in ways that reflected the diversity and opinions of local populations.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Ronald P Formisano, *Boston Against*

The national economic downturn, too, was a complicated national phenomenon that municipalities had to cope with at the local level. Inflation affected local governments and school systems in the same way it affected ordinary citizens dismayed about the dwindling capabilities of their paychecks. Jimmy Carter had the misfortune of occupying the White House during what he termed an era of limits; very few Americans were enthusiastic about the idea of settling for less when it came to their hopes, dreams, and ambitions. The unhappy experiences of the Vietnam War and Watergate scandal made the public less inclined to trust public officials and the capacity of public institutions to address societal problems. The taxpayer's revolt during the late 1970s was one result of this mounting discontent; support for conservative politicians who promised to lower taxes and rein in government would follow in subsequent decades. People in Montgomery County continued to care about education and to want the best for their public schools during the 1970s, but dwindling resources and memories of previous educational battles made the stakes seem higher and the possibility for compromise among interested groups of people less likely.<sup>2</sup>

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*Busing: Race, Class and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1991); Jerald Podair, *The Strike that Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Steven J.L. Taylor, *Desegregation in Boston and Buffalo* (Albany, NY: SUNY Albany Press, 1998); Jonathan Zimmerman, *Whose America?: Culture Wars in the Public Schools* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Howell S. Baum, *Brown in Baltimore: School Desegregation and the Limits of Liberalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010); Deirdre Cobb-Roberts, Sherman Dorn and Barbara J. Sutcliffe, eds, *Schools as Imagined Communities: The Creation of Identity, Meaning, and Conflict in US History* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> For more coverage of waning enthusiasm for public initiatives, rising conservatism, and their impact on educational battles, see Thomas Byrne Edsall with Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1991); Peter Dow, *Schoolhouse Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Robert O. Self *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Sidney Blumenthal, *The Rise of the Counter-Establishment* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); Alan

The major demographic changes to the county began in 1968, the same year that the teachers went on strike. That summer the County Council passed a fair housing law, and the following summer the Council approved an open accommodations act.<sup>3</sup> For decades black families had been prohibited from moving into the county because of restrictive housing covenants, and even after these were outlawed unspoken but widely-accepted prohibitions on selling or renting real estate to black people effectively prevented blacks from finding residence. Other forms of legally-sanctioned discrimination also allowed businesses to prohibit blacks from patronizing many county establishments. Housing policies and equal economic opportunities were focal points for black activists across the nation, and in Montgomery County local black leaders worked with some white liberals to eradicate the legal barriers that prevented black people from living in this suburban community.<sup>4</sup>

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Brinkley, *Liberalism and its Discontents* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution* (New York: The Free Press, 1999); Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America is Wracked by Culture Wars* (New York: Metropolitan, 1995); Godfrey Hodgson, *The World Turned Right Side Up: A History of Conservative Ascendancy in America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996); Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Vintage, 2000); Diane Ravitch, *The Schools We Deserve: Reflections on the Educational Crises of Our Time* (New York: Basic, 1985); Jean Sefancic and Richard Delgado *No Mercy: How Conservative Think Tanks and Foundations Changed America's Social Agenda* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996); Jonathan Zimmerman *Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Passage of these two laws also prompted the county to invest more money in its Human Relations Commission, a public agency tasked with investigating allegations of discrimination based on race or ethnicity. According to Alan Dean, the Secretary of the HRC, it was not uncommon in the early 1970s for a family to be told that an apartment was available over the phone only to be turned away in person when the landlord discovered they were black. Montgomery County Archives (MCA), RG 13: Office of Public Information, Box 3, Tape 94, "Human Relations Commission."

<sup>4</sup> Norman Christeller, a white activist who became interested in racial equality through his church, worked on expanding public housing opportunities in Rockville and elsewhere in the county during the 1960s. Also, as more white people began to move into the mid-county area, Christeller worked with local black leaders on the "save our Scotland" campaign designed to allow blacks to

The changed housing and accommodations policies encouraged thousands of black families, along with some Latinos, to move into Montgomery County in the late 1960s. These new residents settled in the increasingly urbanizing areas of places like Silver Spring in the down-county area, and as more racial and ethnic minorities moved into that area some white families opted to move north and purchase homes in the mid-county region.<sup>5</sup> The black population of the Wheaton electoral district, an area that included Silver Spring and Takoma Park, grew from 9,020 in 1970 to 27,459 in 1980; over the same period, the overall population of that district declined by 19,517 as white families moved north to the developing areas surrounding Rockville. During the 1970s, Montgomery County's total black population doubled, rising to almost nine percent of the county's total population.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, the baby boom finally tapered off. School enrollment peaked at around 126,000 in 1973 and began to decline; by 1981 the school population was below 98,000.<sup>7</sup> School officials in the early 1970s anticipated the coming decline in total enrollment, which presented a particularly vexing situation: countywide the school system would have empty classrooms, but in some areas, like

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remain in an area of Rockville that had been a black enclave since the 1800s. In the 1970s Christeller served on the County Council, where his focus was more on efficient spending than on racial issues. Transcript of oral history interview with Norman Christeller, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 2, 18-21.

<sup>5</sup> The Spanish-speaking population remained relatively small during the 1970s, and most of the discussion between school officials and the citizenry focused on black students when "human relations" were under consideration. In addition to the Spanish-speaking immigrants there were also a fair number of Asian immigrants, including Vietnamese, arriving in the county at this time. During the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, these groups would grow in number and school policies on diversity and multiculturalism would grow to encompass them. But during the period under discussion, the primary focus of policymakers and concerned citizens was black-white relations and the educational experience of black students in MCPS.

<sup>6</sup> *Washington Post* "In Montgomery, Integration is 'Moving Target,'" April 9, 1981, MD1.

<sup>7</sup> *Washington Post*, "Montgomery Plan Lists 34 Schools to Close," May 23, 1981, B8.

the mid-county region, there would actually be a shortage of classroom space. The mid- and up-county regions were projected to have 20,150 classroom seats available for an anticipated 28,973 schoolchildren by 1985, while the down-county projected to have thousands of empty seats and a dwindling school-aged population.<sup>8</sup> These down-county schools were declining in enrollment while becoming more and more densely populated with black students. This may have been attributable to *de facto* as opposed to *de jure* segregation as far as the white population was concerned, but elsewhere in the United States courts were ordering busing programs to alleviate racial imbalance within school districts.<sup>9</sup>

Superintendent Homer Elseroad offered a first attempt at addressing the situation in 1972 by recommending that Rosemary Hills Elementary School in Silver Spring be transformed from a traditional K-6 neighborhood elementary school into a “model” school open to students from all parts of the county. “Model” schools used open classrooms, team-teaching, and other new and experimental pedagogical innovations.<sup>10</sup> In 1972 Rosemary Hills was already more than 50% minority and that

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<sup>8</sup> For enrollment and capacity projections, see MCA, Board of Education Printed Materials, “Public Education in Montgomery County, Maryland. An Orientation Report for the Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Charles M. Bernardo,” 1975, 52.

<sup>9</sup> Many scholars have demonstrated that the physical segregation of black and white people in American suburbs was far from accidental and in fact the result of federal, state, and local policies that encouraged the separation of races during the first decades after World War Two. By the time that these policies had been eradicated, such as when Montgomery County finally passed its fair housing and open accommodations laws, the decades of population settlement made it difficult for integration to occur. Moreover, many white families did not believe or understand that they had benefited from state intervention and instead contended that they had “freely” moved to an area with “good schools;” these people resented affirmative action, mandated busing, and other initiatives designed to address the decades of unfair treatment of blacks. Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 212-221. Robert O. Self *American Babylon*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); David M.P. Freund, *Colored Property* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> *Washington Post*, “Shift Urged to Keep School from Being Mostly Black,” May 26, 1972, C1.

figure was rising; within a few years, the school was projected to be almost 100% black and Latino.<sup>11</sup> According to the federal Department of Housing, Education, and Welfare, a school with a black population more than twenty percent above the black population in the school district was racially unbalanced, and at the time Montgomery County was only around 5% minority.<sup>12</sup> Elseroad planned to disperse current Rosemary Hills students to other nearby elementary schools and allow other students from elsewhere in the county to attend the remade school; presumably, liberal and progressive white county residents might want to send their child to the new school to take advantage of the nontraditional educational offerings.

Elseroad and the Board expected some kind of reaction from the parents and members of the Rosemary Hills community but were surprised by the wrath unleashed at a series of public meetings beginning on May 31. An overflow crowd of 400, mostly black and Latino parents and community leaders, jammed the auditorium and adjacent rooms at Rosemary Hills to express their unanimous opposition to the plan. A key talking point among the parents and children who testified was that they valued the diversity of Rosemary Hills. A petition signed by 313 students pleaded that “we don’t understand why they want to close the school where children of all

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<sup>11</sup> In 1965, the enrollment at Rosemary Hills was 9.8 percent black, but by the spring of 1972 it was up to 46 percent black. In addition, a sizable Latino population meant that the school was over fifty percent minority. *Washington Post*, “Shift Urged to Keep School from Being Mostly Black,” May 26, 1972, C1, also see *Washington Post*, “Rosemary Hills’ Blacks Total only 46 Per Cent of the School,” November 9, 1972, C1. The Spanish-speaking population of Montgomery County was still fairly small during the 1970s, and almost all of the issues concerning race – be it racial balance of schools, or race relations – focused on black-white relations. Also, Donald Miedema, Deputy Superintendent of Schools, commented that the Board initiated the plan because they feared the school would soon be 100% minority, see MCA, RG 13: Office of Public Information, Box 4, Tape 140 “Rosemary Hills Elementary Controversy,” 6/25/72.

<sup>12</sup> In Montgomery County, the black population was around 6% at the start of the decade, and close to 10% by the end. According to HEW guidelines, that meant any school with around 30% black students was out of balance. In practice, school system officials began to take the situation seriously when a school was about half black.

colors get along fairly well and are cared for by their teachers.” A local Reverend, Edward Kester, announced the formation of an ad-hoc committee to fight the plan, assailing Elseroad for subjecting community members to “a mindless subservience to racial quotas.”<sup>13</sup>

Kester and the other activists focused on the fact that Elseorad planned to “close” their neighborhood school and bus their kids elsewhere. Hamilton Davis, spokesman for the Rosemary Hills Community Coordinating Committee, charged that the whole proposal had “racist underpinning.”<sup>14</sup> William Raspberry, a black columnist for the *Washington Post*, urged Elseroad to disregard racial balance and simply focus on making Rosemary Hills a great school, noting that “if Rosemary Hills becomes predominately black despite its trend towards excellence, then let it.”<sup>15</sup> Raspberry and the parents involved in the local activist groups disregarded the HEW requirements for racial balance and called on the Superintendent to allow the school to remain heavily minority.

The swift reaction to the Rosemary Hills situation demonstrated that local black leaders could mobilize community members and bring out large numbers of parents and other residents to public hearings, much as liberal activists had done during the previous decades. During the 1960s, black activists had generally not been involved in educational politics because they represented such a small percentage of

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<sup>13</sup> *Washington Post*, “Angry Parents Protest Dispersal,” June 1, 1972, C1.

<sup>14</sup> The Board announced that current Rosemary Hills students would be allowed to stay at the model school on June 9 after a week of heavy criticism. *Washington Post*, “Parents Fume at Modified School Plans,” June 10, 1972, B1. The Rosemary Hills Community Coordinating Committee filed their bias complaint with the county’s human relations committee a few days later. *Washington Post*, “Montgomery Parents Plan Bias Charge,” June 11, 1972, C1.

<sup>15</sup> *Washington Post* “Rosemary Hills Ruckus,” June 2, 1972, A23.



the county's overall population, but that began to change as policy changes allowed more blacks to move into the county. Publicly pressuring school officials by persistently attending meetings and demonstrating a groundswell of popular support had become a common tactic among educational activist groups during the postwar decades, and as their numbers increased it became an effective organizational tool for blacks to advance their own educational vision. In this particular case, that educational vision included a neighborhood school for black children; Kester, Davis, and the other activists knew that predominantly-white elementary schools were not being modified and they wanted their predominantly-black school to be afforded equal treatment.

Significantly, this expression of political organization and mobilization was marshaled in defense of one particular school. During the segregated, era white school officials had paid very little attention to the education of black children, and during the first years of desegregation the administration had prioritized white concerns about maintaining the status quo. Blacks were determined to advance the cause of black education because they were accustomed to blacks being ignored by the white majority. Their defense of the Rosemary Hills neighborhood school was simple and straightforward: black children deserved to have a local neighborhood school, just like all of the white children had. This was an extension of the educational vision that blacks had nurtured for decades, focused on providing black children with the equal education that they had never had available to them. However, this focus by black activists left open the possibility that some white

residents could misconstrue black demands for equality as demands for special treatment and preferential consideration.

Elseroad backed down on his plan to restructure Rosemary Hills, but the demographic trends were unmistakable and school officials knew they had to do something to address them.<sup>16</sup> By 1974, eleven schools in Montgomery County were out of compliance with the HEW guidelines for racial balance, with many more poised to become so in the coming years.<sup>17</sup> Most of these were elementary schools in the down-county area that could hold as many as 600 students but, due to declining birthrates and migration out of the area, actually had two-thirds or fewer of that number enrolled.<sup>18</sup> An additional problem was the economic slowdown and fears of inflation. A two-thirds full elementary school required the same amount of electricity and heating oil as a full school, and with costs rising school officials had to maximize efficiency.

The Board of Education created a Small Schools Task Force in March 1973 to study the various issues – declining overall enrollment, increased concentration of black students in the down-county area, and cost-effectiveness of operating small

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<sup>16</sup> *Washington Post* “Board to Bar Rosemary Hills Plan” June 21, 1972, C1, also *Washington Post*, “Elseroad Withdraws Rosemary Hills Plan,” June 27, 1972, C1.

<sup>17</sup> The NAACP brought a lawsuit against HEW in 1974 which argued that 125 school systems contained schools that were out of balance and charged HEW for not enforcing their own regulations. Montgomery County was one of the school systems mentioned in that suit. Judge John Pratt ordered the HEW to challenge these districts to demonstrate that they were making efforts to address racial balance in March of 1975. The county was never placed under court order to modify its integration efforts, in large part because “good faith” efforts had been made in the county to address racial imbalance. See “Judge Sets Integration Timetable” *Washington Post*, March 15, 1975, A1, as well as *Washington Post* “HEW Clears County Schools” April 29, 1975, A1. Also see “Small Schools, Racial Imbalance, Secondary Utilization” 11/26/74, MCA, RG 13: Office of Public Information, Box 7, Tape 228.

<sup>18</sup> For example, Rosemary Hills Elementary, in the Silver Spring area, had 656 students enrolled in 1965 and 434 students enrolled in 1972. *Washington Post*, “Shift Urged to Keep School from Being Mostly Black,” May 26, 1972, C1.

elementary schools – affecting the down-county elementary schools.<sup>19</sup> Members of the Task Force quickly realized that the problems could only be addressed by some combination of closing schools, busing students, and perhaps grade-level reorganization, meaning that instead of multiple elementary schools offering a comprehensive kindergarten through sixth grade program, some schools would offer k-3 or k-2, while others would offer the upper elementary grades. Grade-level reorganization allowed administrators to direct the flow of black and white students to specific schools for the early and later elementary grades, preventing racially-unbalanced “neighborhood schools” in predominantly black areas. All of these options – closures, busing, and reorganization – were on the table and members of the task force as well as within MCPS administration knew that any course of action was likely to spark considerable objection or resistance from members of the communities affected, as had been the case at Rosemary Hills the year before.<sup>20</sup>

In anticipation of community resistance, between 1973 and 1976 the Task Force and various subcommittees held an exhaustive number of public hearings as they sought both to gather information while also gradually inform the public about

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<sup>19</sup> A thorough description of the Small Schools Policy can be found in “Public Education in Montgomery County, Maryland: An Orientation Report for the Superintendent of Schools, Charles M. Bernardo,” MCA, BOE Printed Materials, 6-7. Also see MCA, RG 13: Office of Public Information, Box 7, Tape 216, “Small School Policy” 7/24/74 for the creation of the task force, and Box 9, Tape 307 “Opening of School/Enrollments” 8/29/76 for the explanation of what constituted a “small” school.

<sup>20</sup> For more on the Rosemary Hills episode, see MCA, RG 13: Office of Public Information, Box 4, Tape 140 “Rosemary Hills Elementary Controversy,” 6/25/72. *Washington Post*, “Shift Urged to Keep School from Being Mostly Black,” May 26, 1972, C1; *Washington Post*, “Angry Parents Protest Dispersal,” June 1, 1972, C1; *Washington Post*, “Parents Fume at Modified School Plans,” June 10, 1972, B1; *Washington Post* “Rosemary Hills Ruckus,” June 2, 1972, A23; *Washington Post* “Board to Bar Rosemary Hills Plan” June 21, 1972, C1; *Washington Post*, “Elseroad Withdraws Rosemary Hills Plan,” June 27, 1972, C1.

the unavoidable changes on the horizon.<sup>21</sup> School system officials chose to operate in a deliberate fashion in no small part to compile a public record that could demonstrate how all decisions were made with maximum levels of community input.<sup>22</sup> Since the 1940s, public involvement in local educational politics had steadily increased; in addition to the larger countywide interest groups discussed in this dissertation, local P-TAs and neighborhood associations channeled their energies towards the maintenance of their particular school, and the possibility of school closures increased the anxiety felt by people in particular neighborhoods. To avoid alienating the parents and community of one specific school, as had occurred at Rosemary Hills, officials identified “clusters” of schools within a geographic area that would all be modified in some way. This put the focus on overall educational quality, and Board members hoped a sense of solidarity about the excellence of the whole school system would outweigh the provincial attachment that people might have to their neighborhood school.

The focus on overall educational quality was reminiscent of the desegregation era in the 1950s, but there was a significant difference. Instead of policies that valued managerial efficiency and standardization while deemphasizing racial differences, the policies developed in the spring of 1976 were presented to the public as desirable in

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<sup>21</sup> William Wilder, Director of Facilities for MCPS, describes the formation of Area Planning Committees and the Citizens Committees which undertook this work, see MCA, RG 13: Office of Public Information, Box 6, Tape 216 "Small School Policy," 7/24/74.

<sup>22</sup> The deliberate nature was surely intentional. After the Rosemary Hills fiasco, school system officials learned to always go the extra mile and patiently explain every small step being taken to the public and solicit input before taking action. MCA, RG 13: Office of Public Information, Box 6, Tape 233 “Small Schools, Racial Imbalance, Secondary Utilization,” 1/26/75. For all that effort, school system officials were still accused of not soliciting enough community opinion, and community groups from several schools filed lawsuits to block reorganization plans based on that objection; those lawsuits were all dismissed.

part because of the educational benefits of blacks and whites learning together.<sup>23</sup> This reflected a shift in attitude among white liberals concerning race relations. It was not enough to simply create color-blind policies that placed black and white children in the same classrooms. Instead, as School Board President Verna Fletcher commented, “It is important for students in a pluralistic society to have a multicultural education,” meaning educational programs that specifically addressed racial and ethnic differences and similarities.<sup>24</sup>

The School Board announced a plan in 1976 that affected 28 different elementary schools in the down-county suburban area. In addition to closing some of the smallest and most under-enrolled schools the Board initiated sweeping reorganization of several schools, moving decisively away from the traditional “neighborhood” school with grades k-6. Some schools were repurposed as “early education centers” that focused on grades k-2, or k-3; other schools housed the higher elementary grades. Reflecting the longstanding tradition of progressive education in the county, some schools were converted into “model” or “open space” schools, with no grades and an emphasis on student-centered pedagogy. Other schools adopted a school-wide themes or emphases on topics like multiculturalism, the relationship between the school and the community, or immersion in languages like French or Spanish. The Board appropriated an additional \$500,000 towards the development of

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<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Verna Fletcher, President of the BOE, commenting on the value of “human relations” within the school system and the educational benefits of a “multicultural” emphasis which was established at several elementary schools as part of the reorganization. MCA, RG 13: Office of Public Information, Box 8, Tape 285 “Integration Decisions” 3/28/76.

<sup>24</sup> MCA, RG 13: Office of Public Information, Box 8, Tape 285 “Integration Decisions” 3/28/76; also see Box 8, Tape 281, “Integration and Small Schools,” 3/7/76; *Washington Post* “Alternative Schools for Takoma Park,” April 28, 1977, MD1.

some of these special programs, no small gesture during a time of economic hardship.<sup>25</sup>

Verna Fletcher and other Board members hoped to create a situation that allowed both voluntary transfer of students, white and black, who could choose among the special programs, while also compelling the redistribution of students through the creation of the “early education” centers that drew students away from their neighborhoods and to a larger facility located a few miles away. The policy was decidedly different from simply busing students of particular races across the county to achieve a neat and tidy racial mix. Fletcher attempted to convince the public that a “diverse, vibrant program” was being established within the down-county elementary schools.<sup>26</sup> Implicit in the reorganization policy was the idea that racial imbalance in elementary schools was itself potentially threatening to the education received by the children – of both races – in those schools. Reorganization to promote better racial balance had educational benefits for everyone, black and white, and would create better schools for all. In some respects, this was an evolution of the progressive educational vision that had been emphasized by liberal activists and school officials throughout the postwar era. The idea that schools could help teach students tolerance and to appreciate multiculturalism built upon the progressive idea that schools could teach student to be responsible citizens in a democratic republic.

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<sup>25</sup> Fletcher mentioned the amount of the allocation, and noted the significance of the sizable sum, during her appearance on “Montgomery County Comments,” a local public affairs radio program. MCA, RG 13: Office of Public Information, Box 8, Tape 285 “Integration Decisions” 3/28/76.

<sup>26</sup> Fletcher also noted that a racially balanced school “Allows for people naturally living together and learning together,” promoting social harmony. “Whether they (parents) realize it or not, we’re all in the same world.” *Washington Post* “School Plan Stirs Opposition” February 23, 1976, C1.

Some parents were skeptical. Sarah Warren, a white woman whose small daughter was to be reassigned away from her neighborhood school, complained that she felt “outraged and absolutely helpless,” accusing the Board of developing “a foolish, idiotic scheme.” “I just want to hit someone,” she said.<sup>27</sup> Sue Rosenthal, a white mother with a fifth grader at Somerset Elementary, noted that “most of these people bought in the neighborhood so their kids could walk to school” and that parents didn’t want their children to ride a bus.<sup>28</sup> Such complaints had to be taken very seriously by the Board of Education. Across the nation, including in neighboring Prince George’s County, proposals to bus students across school districts for the purpose of achieving racial balance had been met with staunch opposition.<sup>29</sup> Sue Rosenthal’s arguments were repeated over and over in neighborhoods across the nation: white residents argued that they had chosen to buy a home in a particular area so their child could walk to the local neighborhood school, and busing policies unfairly punished these families by compelling their children to ride on a bus simply to achieve some particular racial balance of students.<sup>30</sup> Fletcher hoped to deflect the

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<sup>27</sup> *Washington Post* “School Plan Stirs Opposition” February 23, 1976, C1.

<sup>28</sup> *Washington Post* “School Plan Stirs Opposition” February 23, 1976, C1. *Washington Post*, “Busing Vexes Chevy Chase Liberals,” July 6, 1976, C1. A deputy US Solicitor General complains about having moved to Chevy Chase so his son to walk to a “good neighborhood school.”

<sup>29</sup> For some examples of controversies over busing and other integration initiatives, see Matthew D. Lassiter, *Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Gary Orfield, *Must we Bus? Segregated Schools and National Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1978); Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1991).

<sup>30</sup> Suburban scholars have demonstrated how white families benefited from state and federal policies during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s that allowed all-white neighborhoods to develop in the suburbs. Although the white families may have truly believed that they had freely chosen to move to a neighborhood because of the good schools, they were often unaware (or unconcerned) that black families had not had the same opportunity to “freely” move to that area. The controversies over school busing were one way that white attitudes about race were reshaped, away from a straightforward racial bias against black people and towards a class-based notion of economic freedom and the right to live in

charge of quota-filling by touting the benefits of multicultural education; MCPS officials tried to argue that better racial balance actually *improved* the educational opportunities for all students.

Some parents directly questioned that premise. Priscilla Wood, a white resident of the down-county area who self-identified as a liberal with a progressive racial attitude, found herself torn “between her ideals and her practical worries, between what she wants for the world and what she wants for her son.” Wood felt uneasy, wondering whether the whole school year would be a waste, while her neighbor Raymond Randolph commented “I think it’s a goddamn shame to run the risk of destroying that school because of this, and I think that’s a substantial risk.” Randolph, who had moved to Chevy Chase because he wanted his son Trevor to be able to walk to a “good neighborhood school,” was enraged at the prospect of Trevor getting an inferior education at the new early childhood development school. This concern directly countered the Board’s attempts to portray the reorganization as a way to improve the educational experience of black and white children. Even in a county with a substantial number of sympathetic liberals who “want to do what’s best for society,” the question nagged: “do you want your child to be the tool in the experiment?”<sup>31</sup> There was considerable unease among white parents about whether the reorganization might result in an inferior education for their own children. The

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a particular neighborhood and send your children to those schools. Matthew D. Lassiter, *Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); David M.P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy & White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

<sup>31</sup> *Washington Post*, “Busing Vexes Chevy Chase Liberals,” July 6, 1976, C1. Also see *Washington Post*, “Montgomery Parents Protest: Pupil Shift Resisted,” April 20, 1976, C1, where parents alleged that the reorganization would have an “adverse educational impact” on the schools.



liberal and progressive attitude about education held by many white county residents seemed to have some limits when it came to racial equality and multiculturalism.

The School Board's policy immediately helped to alleviate racial imbalance in the down-county schools in the fall of 1976. For example, Chevy Chase Elementary converted from a K-6 school with a 3% minority enrollment to a 2-6 school with about 20% minorities while Rosemary Hills converted from a K-6 school with almost 90% minorities to a k-2 primary school with about 40% minority enrollment.<sup>32</sup> These two schools were only a few miles apart, and instead of one being overwhelmingly white while the other was overwhelmingly black, the reorganization allowed both to achieve a more equitable racial balance.<sup>33</sup> Similar redistribution occurred at the other 25 schools which were included in the reorganization plan. Although this only represented the first step in what would be a lengthy process of integration, school system officials had reason for guarded optimism. A voluntary program to address racial imbalance, grounded in maintaining educational excellence, had been carefully developed and tested, and the early indication was that the plan could work.

Each year the Board worked to develop similar policies affecting different "clusters" of schools to address the issues of declining enrollment and racial

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<sup>32</sup> Because of its location in Silver Spring, Rosemary Hills became an easily-identified signal of the ongoing restructures, closures, and reorganizations. This was the same school whose parents had initially protested the conversion to a "model" school proposed by Homer Elseroad in 1972. After the reorganization in 1976, Rosemary Hills operated as a k-2 school until 1981, when the Board opted to close it entirely. *Washington Post* "Montgomery Board to Close Minority Area Grade School," November 20, 1981, A1.

<sup>33</sup> This comparison is perhaps too neat; there were other schools involved in the same "cluster," and so not every student from Rosemary Hills and Chevy Chase were involved in a direct transfer to the other school. Still, this example illustrates how the Board had hoped the plan would work. See *Washington Post* "Montgomery Pupils Shift Schools Calmly" September 2, 1976, A1.

imbalance.<sup>34</sup> By 1979, 25 schools had been closed and dozens had been reorganized. That year, the MCPS Department of Educational Accountability released a report showing test score results for fifth graders at the newly-integrated schools were mostly unchanged when compared to those same students' scores in tests taken in the third grade, prior to reorganization. Similarly, students at the new schools were scoring similarly to students in other schools in the county that were "naturally" integrated and had not been a part of the reorganization. In other words, integration had not materially harmed the educational program, and had perhaps generated some less tangible benefits. "The importance of desegregation is ... in the human understanding that children acquire," said Joy Frechling, who worked on the report. Marian Long, a member of the PTA at Chevy Chase Elementary, agreed. "During winter vacation, we went skiing in Maine, and my son came up to me and said 'this is all crazy. There're no black people here.'"<sup>35</sup>

Despite this evidence of success, there were other outcomes that were decidedly less positive. On the first day of school in 1976 about 35 of an expected 97 white kindergarten and first grade students who had been transferred to Montgomery Knolls Elementary school did not show up, and school officials estimated that as many as 20 children at both Larchmont and Pinecrest elementary schools may have been withdrawn by their parents because of the integration plan. Gil Valdez, a school

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<sup>34</sup> These "magnet" programs were also implemented in high schools in the early 1980s, when the declining enrollment and racial imbalance problems began to appear at that level. At Montgomery Blair High School, a science and mathematics magnet was implemented and successfully attracted more white and Asian students to a school that was becoming more densely populated with blacks and Latinos. As the Board had promised during the first reorganization, the academic programs offered at Blair improved the educational opportunities for all students, while the racial imbalance problem was addressed.

<sup>35</sup> *Washington Post* "Montgomery Report Shows Desegregation of Schools Working," March 22, 1979, C3.

official, told the *Post*, “I don’t know if I want to use the term white flight, but they’re not there.”<sup>36</sup> Valdez’s frank admission of attrition from MCPS by white families because of the reorganization of down-county schools hints at the dissatisfaction that roiled below the surface of the transition. Some white people were skeptical that the reformed schools would provide a better educational program, and may have believed the opposite: that school system efforts to better integrate the schools meant an inferior education for their own children. It seems possible that some of the white parents who took their children out of the public schools believed that administrators were prioritizing racial quotas over quality education.

Dissatisfaction was not limited to the parents who enrolled their children in private or parochial schools in response to the closures and reorganizations that MCPS undertook in the late 1970s. Although transfers to schools with particular programs may have been voluntary, in some instances white students were denied transfers because their departure would increase the percentage of minority enrollment. In 1978 a white 12-year-old named Greg Engels applied for transfer from Takoma Park Junior High to Eastern Junior High; his mother, Belinda, thought that Eastern’s more traditional academic structure would be better for her son than Takoma Park’s more relaxed and open format. In other words, the Engles were concerned about the academic program available to Greg, not the racial makeup of a school, and were angered when the transfer was denied to maintain a percentage of white students at Takoma Park. Belinda Engles fumed “their reasons (for denying the

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<sup>36</sup> *Washington Post* “Montgomery Pupils Shift Schools Calmly” September 2, 1976, A1; also see MCA, RG 13: Office of Public Information, Box 9, Tape 311, “Desegregation/School Opening” 9/26/76.

transfer) are illogical and offensive... That really is discrimination.”<sup>37</sup> Individual instances like these, where racial balance was held to be more important than the best educational atmosphere for a student, opened up an avenue of criticism of the Board’s policies that were difficult for school officials to refute.<sup>38</sup> Officials continued to emphasize that maintaining an excellent educational program guided their reorganization and closure efforts, but the public grew increasingly skeptical.<sup>39</sup> To many white parents, it appeared as though schools were being closed and reorganized simply to maintain a particular racial ratio. Many local white residents ignored, or were ignorant of, the fact that HEW guidelines compelled school officials like those in Montgomery County to find ways to achieve better racial balance.

When compared to the kinds of controversies over forced busing and other attempts to address racial imbalance that occurred elsewhere in the country, Montgomery County’s integration efforts went relatively smoothly. Citizens protested and complained, but they did so mostly in a reasonable and orderly fashion, within the existing parameters of a system of school governance that provided the community considerable opportunity to be heard.<sup>40</sup> However, although the Board’s

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<sup>37</sup> *Montgomery Journal*, “White Student Denied Transfer,” June 7, 1978.

<sup>38</sup> Ultimately, the regulation governing the transfer of students contained contradictory stipulations. Regulation 265-2, adopted on November 12, 1973, stipulated that transfer should be granted if a parent or student would have “a more likely chance for a productive and successful educational experience” at a new school. But at the same time, the Regulation also said that transfer should only be granted if “the racial/social/economic balance in both schools is not unduly affected.” As the Engles’ found out, the racial balance clause tended to be given more weight than the successful educational experience clause. MCA, BOE Printed, “Public Education in Montgomery County, Maryland: An Orientation Report for the Superintendent of Schools, Charles M. Bernardo,” 11.

<sup>39</sup> For a good sampling of the kinds of arguments used against BOE plans, see *Washington Post*, “Montgomery Parents Protest: Pupil Shift Resisted,” April 20, 1976, C1.

<sup>40</sup> The school closings issue continued to demand attention from school officials into the mid-1980s, and the process was never smooth. Although county residents understood the simple

policies successfully addressed declining enrollment and racial imbalance at the county level over a period of several years, lingering resentment and ill-will festered in pockets of the county.<sup>41</sup> For every school that was closed, for every two schools that were reorganized, there were a group of parents and community leaders disappointed that their neighborhood school had been changed.<sup>42</sup> School system

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mathematics – school enrollment was dropping by tens of thousands and closing schools was absolutely necessary – parents and other citizens reliably protested vehemently when *their* school was slated for closure. No matter what process school officials developed, no matter how much input and consideration was given to concerned citizens, every time schools were slated for closure an organized and spirited protest arose. See, for example, *Washington Post* “Fighting School Closings,” July 2, 1981, MD1. The *Post* has numerous articles from the late 1970s and early 1980s that demonstrate the bitterness and difficulty that characterized this process.

<sup>41</sup> For example, hastily-formed community groups representing Larchmont, Pinecrest, Chevy Chase, Montgomery Knolls, and Alta Vista elementary schools all lodged appeals with the State Board of Education, urging that the plans for reorganization be stopped. The two main arguments advanced by the lawsuits were that things were being done too hastily or that the Board had failed to follow its own stated Small Schools Policy. Since the Board had taken great pains to work slowly and openly with members of the community between 1973 and 1976, the first complaint seemed specious on its face. As to the second, lawyers for the parents were unable to persuade the court that the Board had violated its policy, and the reorganization plans were allowed to proceed. These appeals were noted by Alan Dodd, see MCA, RG 13: Office of Public Information, Box 9, Tape 298 “Implementing Desegregation,” 6/27/76. Dodd pointed out that the process for making these appeals was clearly established in state bylaws and parents were well within their rights to voice their opinions. Later that summer, the State Board upheld Montgomery’s plans, and eventually a Montgomery County Circuit Court Judge also refused to halt the desegregation program, see *Washington Post*, “County Student Transfers Backed,” July 22, 1976, MD1; *Washington Post*, “Rosemary Hills Plan is Upheld,” July 29, 1976, A28; *Washington Post*, “Montgomery School Plan Withstands a Challenge,” August 20, 1976, C1; *Washington Post*, “Montgomery Tone Shifts on Busing,” August 30, 1976, C1; *Washington Post*, “Alta Vista parents sue to get school reopened,” September 2, 1976, MD3. The point, however, was that this kind of opposition indicated that the parents affected by school reorganizations did not always support the programs, and came away from the experience bitter and upset about what was happening to their school system.

<sup>42</sup> For example, in the mid-1970s, a woman petitioned Norman Christeller, the President of the County Council, and asked him to delay a school closing for a year. Her child was entering the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, the last elementary year, and she wanted the child to remain at the same school. Christeller was powerless to change the School Board’s decision to close the school, and he noted that the woman’s concern might have been rooted in the fact that the Ashburn School, where her child would have to attend 6<sup>th</sup> grade, closely bordered a much lower-priced housing development. In other words, this one woman came away from the school closures era disappointed and frustrated because of how it had affected her personally. By the spring of 1981, with enrollment continuing to drop to below 98,000, the Superintendent, Edward Andrews, recommended closing 34 schools over the next five years. In addition to these closures, redrawing boundaries and reorganizing schools were also part of his plan to address declining enrollment and racial imbalance, decisions he knew would be unpopular. As he noted, “we have 180 buildings with the same number of kids that Baltimore County has in 150 buildings.” *Washington Post*, “Montgomery Plan Lists 34 Schools to Close,” May 23, 1981, B8. By this time, junior high and high schools were also part of the closure plans. For the Christeller

officials struggled to convince the public that all of the changes were undertaken to promote a more vibrant, diverse, and multicultural educational atmosphere in the county to benefit all students. Many white parents, however, were unconvinced by this logic and instead grew suspicious that the county's schools were slipping. The educational conservatives running for seats on the School Board in 1978 appealed to this segment of the public by arguing that instead of closing schools and instituting new programs, a return to "the basics" and trimming administrative overhead could save money, allowing more schools to remain open and providing all students a good education.

Conservative criticisms of progressive educational practices were familiar to county residents, but in 1978 there was an added racial component to the critique. Liberal school officials like Verna Fletcher had expanded the concept of progressive education to include an emphasis on multiculturalism and diversity, and some conservatives did not believe these to be appropriate topics for public schools to address. Dissatisfied white parents concerned about school closures and restructuring to emphasize multiculturalism were receptive to conservative calls for a return to traditional instruction in the 3 R's. Also, in addition to the reorganization of the down-county elementary schools, conservatives also attacked some affirmative action reforms, known as the Action Steps, that had been implemented in the mid-1970s.

After the fair housing law was established in 1968, the influx of black families quickly shifted the racial composition of down-county schools. The black population of Montgomery Blair High School tripled in two years, rising to around 235 in the fall

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anecdote, see transcript of oral history interview with Norman Christiller, MCA, RG 16, Series I, Box 1, 33.

of 1970, about 10 percent of the school's total population, and students of both races struggled to cope with the changes. That fall the student newspaper at Blair ran articles noting that incidents of vandalism and "extortion" of students had increased in recent years, implying a connection between these events and the changing school demographics. Students got into heated arguments about the publication of Black Power-themed poetry in the literary magazine, and some black students reported feeling unwelcome and unwanted in the classrooms run by some white teachers. In December, controversy surrounding a Christmas-themed theatrical production escalated into several days of brawls and fistfights; many students believed the outbreak of violence was inevitable and the Christmas play had simply sparked the smoldering embers.<sup>43</sup>

Black students had developed their own Christmas performance that focused on a "black Christmas" shared by a poor family in the ghetto. At one performance, a black actress was tripped by a white student sitting in the audience, a slight many blacks perceived to be intentional. At the next show, some of the actors ad-libbed lines about "white pigs" and incorporated the clenched-fist Black Power salute into their performance, causing angry white students to rise and walk out. Fights broke out in and outside the auditorium almost immediately, and more fighting occurred the next day. Half of the 2,300 students enrolled at Blair did not show up for school on the last day before winter vacation because of the ongoing violence, and a school

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<sup>43</sup> *Washington Post* "Change Brings Trouble, but Blair Copes," January 10, 1971, 53.

system official grimly noted that the racial tension at Blair reflected the “racial problems at a significant number of Montgomery County schools.”<sup>44</sup>

Skirmishes like the one at Blair continued to flare up in county high schools, and a 1972 incident at Richard Montgomery High School in Rockville prompted school system officials to initiate comprehensive reforms to address the problem of race relations. On November 2, 1972, the school paper at Richard Montgomery published two letters by white students implying black students were responsible for the tense racial atmosphere at the school. 17 black students marched to the office of Jack McHale, the principal, to express their displeasure at the accusation.<sup>45</sup> The next day McHale and his assistant principals organized three separate meetings where black and white students could come together and discuss the letters and the larger issues they brought up. McHale later confessed he wanted to allow students to express their feelings but was very concerned about how to ensure that such a discussion would remain civil. His solution was to have three smaller meetings occurring simultaneously, instead of a single large assembly that might be harder for teachers and administrators control.

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<sup>44</sup> *Washington Post* “Two Blair Students Seized After Fight,” December 24, 1970, D3. When school resumed in January, the principal went out of his way to note that the “ghetto Christmas” play also included a singing of “The Black National Anthem” by James Weldon Johnson. The principal argued that many white students took offense to this, believing it constituted a rejection of the star-spangled banner, and, somewhat incredibly, was quoted as saying “we are not turning the school over to black kids. We are not bending over backwards.” Montgomery Blair had about 235 black students enrolled at the time, out of a total enrollment of 2,300. The principal’s remarks were almost certainly an effort to assuage anxious white parents about the possibility of continuing violence after the winter holiday. *Washington Post* “Racial Misunderstanding Blamed in School Unrest,” January 5, 1971, A13.

<sup>45</sup> McHale appeared on *Montgomery County Comments*, a weekly public-affairs program that aired on local radio, later in November and chose his words very carefully when discussing the incident. Without specifying the contents of the letters, he was very clear in his belief that the tone struck by the letter-writers had angered black students in the school, leading to the violence that occurred the following day. See MCA, RG 13: Office of Public Information, Tape 156, “Richard Montgomery HS Principal Explains Fracas,” 11/26/72.



The strategy worked initially, but at the largest of the three meetings some students became agitated when the discussion was halted for lunch before they had a chance to talk. Then, during the lunch period, someone pulled the fire alarm, and at that point chaos reigned. Fights broke out in the hallways and the cafeteria, with students slapping, punching, and scratching each other. Teachers struggled to hold back students and restore order while they waited for the police to arrive. In addition to several students suffering minor cuts and bruises, one white boy had his jaw broken, and a white girl, Elizabeth Hoover, was scratched severely on her face. Three black students were immediately suspended, and an additional three black and eight white students were also suspended after an extended investigation was completed the following week.<sup>46</sup>

Two weeks later, Elizabeth Scull, a member of the Montgomery County Council and daughter of political power broker E. Brooke Lee, sent a pointed letter to the School Board charging that black students at Montgomery County Schools were taking advantage of a double standard with regards to the discipline policy. Scull alleged that “reverse discrimination” created a situation where school officials were hesitant to punish black students, emboldening blacks to harass and intimidate their white peers and creating a tense racial situation that bubbled over at Richard Montgomery. The allegation of overt leniency shown to black students was particularly damaging coming from Scull, who had a long and public history of

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<sup>46</sup> MCA, RG 13: Office of Public Information, Tape 156, “Richard Montgomery HS Principal Explains Fracas,” 11/26/72. Also *Washington Post*, “Rockville Student Cleared in Assault,” December 20, 1972, C1; *Washington Post* “Black Pupils Held Harassing Whites,” November 17, 1972, B1. Hoover’s attacker was a black girl named Esther Wade, who was charged with assault. The charge was dismissed, although the judge acknowledged that Wade had indeed attacked Hoover without provocation.

support for liberal causes and racial tolerance. School Superintendent Homer Elseroad rejected Scull's assertion, arguing that "we treat children fairly and act on an objective basis. Any implication that we discipline them differently because of race... I don't think it's happening in the schools."<sup>47</sup> Elseroad clung to the color-blind logic that had guided school officials during the first years of desegregation, but the failures of that logic seemed apparent to most observers. Some, like Scull, were convinced that favoritism was being shown towards blacks.

However, the notion that black students were treated with more leniency than whites annoyed some black parents and community leaders, who believed that the school system was insensitive to the needs of black students. The Montgomery County Black Coalition, a local civil rights group, declared a "crisis situation concerning relations between blacks and white students," blaming school system officials for failing to provide an educational environment supportive of black students. John Gibson, a member of the Coalition, noted that many teachers assume black children "are going to end up pushing a broom somewhere" and treated them accordingly.<sup>48</sup> In addition, dropping out of school was a growing problem in the county, with blacks dropping out at nearly twice the rate of whites.<sup>49</sup> Della Cooper, chairman of the Montgomery County Community Action Committee, a federally funded antipoverty group, argued that system was producing "functional illiterates at

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<sup>47</sup> *Washington Post* "Black Pupils Held Harassing Whites," November 17, 1972, B1.

<sup>48</sup> *Washington Post*, "County Schools Held Failing to Meet Black Pupil Needs," December 22, 1972, C4.

<sup>49</sup> In September of 1972, MCPS spokesman Ken Muir noted that about 800 students had dropped out during the 1971-72 school year. The following year that number grew to 972, two-thirds of whom were black students, with black males making up the single largest group of dropouts. MCA, BOE Printed Materials, "Citizens Advisory Committee on Minority Relations Final Report," 33. Also *Washington Post* "County Procedures Criticized by Jury," September 28, 1972, C2.

age 16. I have seen dropouts with 10 years of education who can't read second-grade books.”<sup>50</sup>

The Board of Education found itself caught in between competing explanations for the escalating racial tension in its schools. On the one hand, people like Elizabeth Scull were suggesting that the school system was being too tolerant when it came to monitoring the behavior of black students. On the other hand, black community leaders argued that black students were trapped inside a system which made insufficient effort to address and understand their needs, creating a cycle of disillusionment and despair that eventually resulted in dropping, or perhaps lashing, out. The color-blind attitude that guided school officials since the 1950s had failed, and this might have occurred sooner but the restrictive housing policies had effectively excluded blacks from moving into the county until the late 1960s. The presence of more black students in the schools had exposed the race-neutral policies as insufficient, and administrators were compelled to take steps to make sure blacks were receiving an equal educational opportunity.

In March of 1973, a few months after the incident at Richard Montgomery, the School Board created a new Committee on Minority Relations to undertake an unprecedented examination of the experience of black students in the schools. The committee worked with Social Systems Training and Research, INC (SSTAR), a nonprofit in Vienna, Virginia, to use “appropriate techniques and methods of sociological research,” including opinion surveys and other methods of data collection, to create as comprehensive and objective a portrait of the school system as

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<sup>50</sup> *Washington Post*, “County Schools Held Failing to Meet Black Pupil Needs,” December 22, 1972, C4.

possible.<sup>51</sup> The committee's report, released in July 1974 and grounded in the hard evidence gathered by SSTAR, painted a troubling picture of MCPS perpetuating institutional racism.

The committee report held that Montgomery County schools "generally ignore the problems of black students," and that black students, parents, and community leaders mistrusted school officials and did not think their opinions were valued by the administration.<sup>52</sup> A disproportionate number of black students were assigned to the lowest (most remedial) sections of classes, creating segregation by classroom within a desegregated school. This was exacerbated by a disproportionately high number of black students assigned to special education classes, not for reasons of academic aptitude but for alleged "disciplinary" problems.<sup>53</sup> Many black parents suspected that their children were placed in special education as a form of punishment.

Confidential interviews and surveys revealed subtle forms of prejudice in the attitudes of white teachers, who believed black students were doing about as well as they could in school. In other words, the soft bigotry of low expectations created a situation where white teachers simply assumed blacks could not do as well as whites,

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<sup>51</sup> MCA, BOE Printed Materials, Citizens Advisory Committee on Minority Relations Final Report, July 25, 1974, 2.

<sup>52</sup> *Washington Post* "Montgomery Schools Reported as Ignoring Black Pupils' Needs," July 26, 1974, C1

<sup>53</sup> According to the report, 38% of boys and 35.5% of girls enrolled in special education classes were black even though the black populations of those schools was less than 10% of the total student body. Academically speaking, black students tended to fall into the lowest two quintiles of graduating seniors in terms of class rank. See MCA, BOE Printed Materials, Citizens Advisory Committee on Minority Relations Final Report, July 25, 1974, 3, also 13, also 19-20.

and their poor performance reinforced the biased attitude.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the fact that most of the janitorial and custodial staff was black while most of the teaching staff was white silently reminded blacks of their expected future.<sup>55</sup> White teachers thought that discipline was handled evenly, or perhaps was harsher on white students, even though black males were suspended at four times the rate of white males and black females were suspended at six times the rate of white females.<sup>56</sup> Black parents and community leaders felt not enough was being done to recruit black teachers and black administrators, who could serve as role models for black students. Beyond better role models, the report indicated that white teachers and administrators had an inadequate grasp of the “black experience” and were unable to relate to the black students.<sup>57</sup>

The Committee on Minority Relations felt this was the nub of the problem. The school system was overwhelmingly white and affluent, with fewer than ten percent black students, and the faculty was also predominately white. In order to address the needs of black students, the white faculty and staff needed to be taught about black history, culture, and psychology. Picking up on a national trend towards Black Studies curricula at high schools and universities, the committee recommended that the faculty and administrative staff undergo more training in “human relations” to better understand the black students in their classrooms. The need for increased

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<sup>54</sup> MCA, BOE Printed Materials, Citizens Advisory Committee on Minority Relations Final Report, July 25, 1974, 22, also 27, and 39.

<sup>55</sup> MCA, BOE Printed Materials, Citizens Advisory Committee on Minority Relations Final Report, July 25, 1974, 12-13.

<sup>56</sup> This certainly seemed to refute Elizabeth Scull’s claim that black students benefited from preferential treatment with regards to discipline policies.

<sup>57</sup> MCA, BOE Printed Materials, Citizens Advisory Committee on Minority Relations Final Report, July 25, 1974, 8.

sensitivity and understanding of black people on the part of the white teachers and administrators in the system was a unifying theme of the committee's recommendations. This also echoed the educational vision that black community leaders had promoted for decades: more attention had to be paid to the education of black students.

The evidence gathered by the committee suggested that the educational culture in MCPS contributed to a systematic and pervasive assault on the dignity and self-worth of blacks. Boys in particular were subjected to "dehumanization" and essentially ignored regardless of ability or aspiration and jettisoned off to a Special Ed or remedial classroom to pass the time until graduation.<sup>58</sup> This conclusion may not have surprised black families in the county, but it was a sobering assessment that challenged the image of the school system held by many white liberals. The county's good public schools were not part of the solution to racial inequality; they were part of the problem. The "color-blind" approach that had guided desegregation in the 1950s could not ensure an equal education for black students. Instead, new and targeted policies were necessary to address black students' needs.

In the fall of 1974, Superintendent Homer Elseroad created six task forces to focus on different aspects of the report and come up with "Action Steps" to rectify the situation. By December, twenty-five Action Steps had been identified; according to Elseroad, these were "the latest and most intensive in a series of efforts to make equal opportunity in the school system a reality, not just a slogan."<sup>59</sup> These Steps included

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<sup>58</sup> MCA, BOE Printed Materials, Citizens Advisory Committee on Minority Relations Final Report, July 25, 1974, 41.

<sup>59</sup> MCA, BOE Printed, "Action Steps on Minority Relations," December, 1974, 3.

hiring more Human Relations specialists, stepping up recruitment at historically black colleges for teachers and administrators, creating more transparent and systemized procedures for assignment to special education classes, and improving the Black Studies program across all grades. Also, one of the Action Steps noted that “All MCPS staff will be required to take at least one course dealing with the black experience and culture.”<sup>60</sup> In April 1975, the Board affirmed that all faculty and staff were required to take a professional development course known as HR-18, taught by a school system employee with expertise in the area.<sup>61</sup>

For Wilma Fairley, the black woman who served as Director of Human Relations for MCPS, this particular Action Step was probably the most important. A former elementary school teacher turned administrator, Fairley served as the liaison between the Committee on Minority Relations and the school system, and she had access to the raw statistical information gathered by SSTAR.<sup>62</sup> The lack of understanding of the black experience by white teachers and administrators was the common element among the various problems. Teachers and school-level administrators were on the front lines and the thousands of choices they made every day contributed to the racial culture within the school. Every time a teacher assumed a black student couldn't handle a particular assignment, or broke up an altercation by

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<sup>60</sup> MCA, BOE Printed, “Action Steps on Minority Relations,” December, 1974, 29.

<sup>61</sup> HR stands for Human Relations; the Board's decision to make this class mandatory is mentioned by Wilma Fairley, see MCA, RG 13: Office of Public Information, Box 10, “Black Relations Action Steps,” 7/31/77.

<sup>62</sup> Fairley's appointment as Director had been opposed by the lone black member of the School Board, who had wanted someone from outside the system. Such a person could provide an objective point of view, while Fairley was a “creature of the system” who might not be able to take decisive action. Still, the other members of the Board deemed Fairley the best out of 146 candidates, and she took over as Director in November of 1971. *Washington Post* “Blacks Critical of School Appointment,” November 10, 1971, D9.

reflexively pulling the black student away from the white student, or walked through the cafeteria unaware of and unconcerned by the self-segregation of students, that teacher was helping to perpetuate the inequalities that the committee's report had identified.

For Fairley, educating teachers about black history and culture could serve as a vital preventative measure against racial tension in schools and as a step towards a more equal educational experience for blacks and whites. Lack of understanding of black people by the majority white faculty and administrative staff meant that MCPS was still a white system with a few black students; in order for that system to be truly integrated the administration needed to hire more blacks and also to better educate white employees about the historical, sociological, and cultural challenges faced by black people in the United States. HR-18 was a unique course developed by MCPS Human Relations specialists, and Fairley was confident that "you can't come out of that course without thinking differently."<sup>63</sup>

A few teachers immediately volunteered to take the course, but the Board's efforts to require all faculty and staff to take it ran up against an objection levied by the Montgomery County Education Association (MCEA), the professional organization representing teachers. As discussed in Chapter Four of this dissertation, since the teacher strike in 1968 the MCEA had negotiated legally-binding collective bargaining agreements with the School Board. MCEA's president, Hank Heller, believed that any required professional development course had to be negotiated into the teachers' contract. By simply announcing that the course was mandatory the

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<sup>63</sup>HR-18 was divided into 3 sections, focusing on history, sociology and psychology of black people in America. MCA, RG 13: Office of Public Information, Box 10, Tape 355 "Black Relations Action Steps," 7/31/77; also see Box 11, Tape 394, "Black Relations Action Steps," 5/28/78.



Board seemed to be devaluing the bargaining process and potentially setting a precedent whereby the Board could alter the negotiated contract whenever it desired. Since the right to bargain collectively had only recently been secured, Heller felt obligated to strenuously defend the principle that any modification of conditions of employment had to be negotiated.

On the other hand, by staunchly opposing HR-18 the MCEA opened its members up to charges of insensitivity to racial issues from the black community and other liberals in the county. The teachers' organization had been a leading voice for complete desegregation of the schools in the 1950s and had welcomed black teachers into its ranks less than a month after *Brown* had been announced.<sup>64</sup> Many teachers considered themselves to be very progressive on racial matters and did not want to have their lack of enthusiasm for HR-18 serve as a referendum on their liberal bonafides. But Heller also felt strongly that the negotiated contract was an important victory for teachers, and that teachers' input should not be disregarded or overridden by administrators focused on other matters, like racial tolerance. MCEA struggled to find a middle ground, asking whether the course be offered during the school day (which would require hiring thousands of substitutes) or if attendees could be paid a stipend for taking the class on their own time (which would also necessitate a substantial monetary outlay). Over the next couple of years, fewer than 1,500 of the more than 12,500 school system employees (teachers, administrators, and other staff)

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<sup>64</sup> The association had taken bold stands on racial issues throughout the 1960s, as well. In 1969, MCEA publicly urged the School Board to stop the practice of allowing high school golf teams to play at segregated country clubs in the county. Also that year, MCEA publicly asked the Board to adopt stronger written antidiscrimination policies instead of the vague, general statements that currently discussed race relations in MCPS. *Washington Post*, "Shun Biased Golf Courses, Teachers Ask," May 15, 1969, B1; *Post* "Strong Antibias Stand Urged in Montgomery," June 2, 1969, A21.

took the course while MCEA and the Board argued over whether it was indeed required.<sup>65</sup>

Members of the School Board were determined to follow through with the implementation of the Action Steps, including making HR-18 mandatory. Their determination stood in contrast to 1955, when school officials refused to hire any black teachers or administrators during the first year of desegregation despite lobbying by black community leaders. By the spring of 1978, MCPS was actively stepping up their recruitment of black educators and, by making HR-18 required for the professional development of white teachers, the Board went further than ever before in their acknowledgement of the educational needs of black students. This was not only to address the concerns of black parents but also the concerns of some liberal white county residents who wanted their school system to reflect their commitment to racial equality. It appeared as though at least some liberal whites in the county realized that desegregation in the 1950s had fallen short of creating a school system that provided an equal education for blacks, and this was an unacceptable failure. Also, the liberal faith in progressive education had developed to include a vision of schools as a way to promote racial tolerance in society. MCEA leaders were caught in an unenviable position of wanting to defend their right to negotiate all conditions of employment while not appearing to oppose the broader goals of integration that HR-18 had been adopted to advance.

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<sup>65</sup> The 12,500 figure included 6,775 teachers and 340 principals and assistant principals working in the county's 205 schools, all of whom were represented by MCEA at this time; the administrative staff would split from MCEA in the early 1980s. MCA, BOE Printed, "Public Education in Montgomery County, Maryland," 1975, 53-54. The rest of the employees in the system included supporting services staff and administrators who worked in the central offices. As of June 6, 1978, 1,304 people, see *Montgomery County Sentinel*, "Black Culture Course Suggested For New Teachers," July 6, 1978, A-6. Also see *Montgomery Journal*, "Teacher Pay Tied to Black Studies," September 27, 1978.

In July of 1978, school officials attempted to negotiate a compromise with the MCEA. They reached an agreement to make HR-18 a mandatory summer course, with follow-up sessions twice a month throughout the school year. Crucially, each participant would receive six semester hours of graduate credit, or the equivalent of in-service credits. This was the key point for the MCEA: their members could not be required to take the course without some form of compensation, and the credit hours were a reasonable compromise. Charles Martin, a school system official, was dismissive of the sacrifice that the employees would make. “We obviously are up against a situation where teachers and administrators in this county are resisting against taking this course,” he said. “Frankly, I don’t care what the employees of this school system feel. It is their responsibility (to take the course.)”<sup>66</sup>

In September, however, the School Board unexpectedly went further, passing a resolution by a four to one vote (with two abstentions) that tied participation in HR-18 to all pay raises, promotions, and recertifications awarded by the school system for all of the system’s employees. The course was set to be offered that fall, and classroom teachers were expected to attend late afternoon sessions after school on their own time, without any additional pay. Heller was furious and promised a court challenge as soon as a teacher was denied a step increase or recertification based on noncompliance to the Board’s order. An unnamed school employee told the *Montgomery Journal* that it felt like the Board’s action regarding HR-18 was “a put-down, especially if you’re made to take it,” and warned of a backlash among employees. Marian Greenblatt, the lone Board member to vote against the resolution, fumed that “we are committed to a program that we don’t know the value of” while

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<sup>66</sup> *Montgomery Journal*, “Black Culture Course for All Teachers?” July 26, 1978, A1.

questioning why the Board would not allow other college-level courses to be substituted for participation in HR-18.<sup>67</sup> “I disagree,” Greenblatt said, “with the basic assumption of the School Board that all people in the school system are racists and that this is a racist institution.”<sup>68</sup>

Greenblatt had been elected to the School Board in 1976 and had immediately established herself as a vocal and passionate educational conservative. Echoing the conservative critics who had won seats on the Board in 1962, Greenblatt argued that a bloated bureaucracy was wasting time and money on programs of questionable merit and pushed for more instruction in the fundamentals and a leveling of the educational experience to ensure that all students received a good education. In July of 1977, she introduced a resolution pushing for county-wide standards in all secondary schools in the county, assessed by end-of-year examinations in each major academic subject, foreshadowing points of emphasis for conservative educational reformers in the future.<sup>69</sup> Although Greenblatt remained a lone conservative voice on the Board from 1976 to 1978, issues like the Action Steps and school closures/reorganizations in the down-county area were drawing criticism from some residents who believed school officials were paying too much attention to racial issues and, in the case of the reorganizations, using experimental programs to address racial imbalance.

The Committee on Minority Relations had not, as Greenblatt alleged, said that “all people in the school system are racists and that this is a racist institution,” but the

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<sup>67</sup> *Montgomery Journal*, “Teacher Pay Tied to Black Studies,” September 27, 1978.

<sup>68</sup> *Montgomery Journal*, “Schools Reconsider Black Studies,” August 29, 1978.

<sup>69</sup> Memorandum from Marian Greenblatt to the Board of Education, July 7, 1977. A copy of this memo was included as an appendix in the Senior High School Study, see MCA BOE Printed, “Final Report: Senior High School Study,” Appendix C, C-7.

report did paint a picture of institutional racism that needed correction. By basing the Action Steps on the committee's recommendations the Board seemed to be suggesting that the entire school community – teachers, parents, administrators, students – bore collective responsibility for the unsatisfactorily unequal education available to blacks. The Action Steps forced individual people to accept that they needed to change their behaviors and beliefs in order to better accommodate black student needs, and this provoked defensiveness among many people in the county. In addition to some teachers objecting to HR-18, other white county residents resented being told by school system officials that they were racists.

Some of these residents thought that by drawing too much attention to racial differences, the Board was actually causing more problems than it solved. Rich Kowalewski, a white resident in Wheaton, worried that compelling teachers to take the course would “create hard feelings and promote division in the school system.” Walter Sittner, from Silver Spring, mocked the idea that making teachers take HR-18 would somehow teach all employees how to make black children “feel comfortable” and seethed about the Board's “idiotic, presumptuous, and highly insulting action.” School Board members were overwhelmed with angry calls, including many from teachers, over the decision to make HR-18 mandatory, to the point where Board member Daryl Shaw publicly stated that the Board would revisit the decision, noting that it was “not fair for people to have to take the course” if they can meet the requirements through other courses or experience.<sup>70</sup>

Shaw had originally voted to make the program mandatory, and his reversal disappointed many blacks, including Judith Docca, the chair of the Association of

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<sup>70</sup> *Montgomery Journal*, “Schools Reconsider Black Studies,” August 29, 1978.

Black Educators, who noted that the majority of teachers who had taken the course felt it had resulted in “skill acquisition in the difficult area of black-white relationships,” and in improved relationships among black and white personnel.<sup>71</sup> Other members of the black community were frustrated at Shaw’s backtrack and MCEA’s ongoing objection to HR-18. The Montgomery County NAACP slammed MCEA leaders for “racially bigoted and racially insensitive actions and pronouncements” in their efforts to undo the requirement. Hank Heller and other teachers were stunned when the NAACP threatened to use their own financial and legal resources against MCEA if the organization tried to challenge the requirement in court. “We’ve been saying it’s not a racial issue for two years,” Heller complained. “We would be just as upset if the School Board made it a four-hour course in drug abuse,” he added, citing another controversial issue that the school system was grappling with in the 1970s.<sup>72</sup> The NCCAP was unmoved. “It is now quite clear,” said an NAACP spokesman, “that assumptions of non-bigotry and good intentions toward black children do not apply (to MCEA)... (their position) demonstrates that the official representatives of the county’s teachers are against the interests of black children and parents.”<sup>73</sup>

HR-18 illustrated how both teachers and black leaders tended to focus their educational activism narrowly, on issues that affected them specifically, as opposed to with a broader perspective on MCPS overall. Both Heller and the NAACP leaders

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<sup>71</sup> *Montgomery Journal*, “Some Views on the Black Studies Course,” January 17, 1979.

<sup>72</sup> *Montgomery Journal*, “NAACP Calls Teacher Union ‘Racial Bigots,’” October 3, 1978.

<sup>73</sup> *Montgomery County Sentinel*, “NAACP Faults Teachers Union on Black Course,” October 12, 1978.

had compelling reasons for the positions they took, and yet these positions hardened into a situation where a compromise or mutually beneficial resolution seemed impossible. Heller was mindful that the right to negotiate the contract had been hard-won, and memories of the strike still provoked strong feelings in the minds of many county residents even a decade later. Some friendships had been severed due to differences of opinion over the strike, while the public's opinion of teachers had changed irrevocably. With such a high price it seemed only logical to Heller to hang on to the benefits that teachers had secured in the winter of 1968. On the other hand, the Action Steps were the first time that MCPS had ever acknowledged that the educational experience of black youths required specific and targeted attention. Black community leaders had worked for more than a hundred years to try and improve black education in Montgomery County, and the leaders in the NAACP saw the Action Steps as their opportunity to finally secure some real gains.

In August the leaders of several black churches and community organizations sent a questionnaire to candidates for School Board regarding their position on the Action Steps and HR-18. Of the thirteen candidates, only two mentioned HR-18 specifically in their responses and several others gave bland and noncommittal answers to questions about the Action Steps. Joseph Barse, a white man who would win a seat on the Board in November, demurred when he received the questionnaire, simply saying that "I am unable to answer your questions in the detail you desire." Eleanor Zappone and Carol Wallace, white women who also won seats, hewed towards a race-neutral perspective. Zappone argued that "expectations should not fluctuate because of cultural and racial differences among children," while Wallace

simply said that elementary instruction had to be improved for all children so as to make all secondary school programs open to all students. These three candidates, who joined with Greenblatt to form a new conservative majority on the Board after their election in 1978, gave the impression that they did not think additional measures to address the experience of black students in Montgomery County schools were necessary.<sup>74</sup> This attitude, which was reminiscent of the original desegregation policies in the 1950s, disagreed with signaling out black students for “special” treatment and instead took a broader perspective on overall countywide excellence for everyone.

The Action Steps were only one of several issues that aligned Zappone, Barse, and Wallace with the incumbent conservative Marian Greenblatt, whose husband, Mickey Greenblatt, ran their campaign.<sup>75</sup> These three candidates were educational conservatives, and like the candidates who had run for School Board in 1962, the slate that formed in 1978 charged that the Superintendent and incumbent Board were wasting too much money on experimental programs. Barse was committed to the educational fundamentals, arguing that “students must *know* reading, writing, mathematics as foundations for other work in school ... the basics must be learned better.” Wallace called for more resources to be reallocated “directly into the classroom” and away from the bloated administrative bureaucracy. She also was a vocal opponent of the transition from Junior High Schools to Middle Schools, an experiment which focused on the unique learning situation of adolescents in grades six through eight that had been initiated at a cost of an additional \$600 per pupil.

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<sup>74</sup> *Montgomery Journal* “A Curious Silence on Black Scores,” August 30, 1978, A1.

<sup>75</sup> *Washington Post*, “‘Outside’ Slate Takes Three School Seats,” November 8, 1978, A26.



Zappone united all of her complaints about the current school system by assigning blame to the Superintendent, Charles Bernardo. “I will vote to remove him because he has failed,” she said in a campaign statement. “I want an educator whom parents can trust, whose statements illuminate, not obscure. I want a Superintendent who focuses on the educational needs in the classroom, not management schemes or manipulating staff personnel.”<sup>76</sup>

On the campaign trail, Barse, Wallace, and Zappone, mirrored the electoral strategy employed by the educational conservatives who had won election in 1962. They urged a return to the fundamentals and blamed high spending on the Superintendent’s proclivity for policies of dubious value. They actually went further than their predecessors by promising to vote to remove Bernardo from office as part of their campaigning.<sup>77</sup> As had been the case in 1962, the conservative candidates in 1978 found success criticizing the status quo and promising to get Montgomery County’s schools back on the right track. Also reminiscent of 1962, the conservatives argued that their prescriptions for education reform benefitted the whole community,

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<sup>76</sup> Another line of attack for the conservatives was an administrative reorganization that Bernardo initiated the year before; similar to the reorganization recommended by McKinsey and Company in the 1950s, the restructuring created new administrative positions that the conservatives did not support. However, Bernardo countered the criticisms by noting that 70 administrative positions had been eliminated and only 51 had been created, meaning his reorganization had a net decrease of 19 positions. *Washington Post*, “‘Outside’ Slate Takes Three School Seats,” November 8, 1978, A26. All thirteen of the candidates for School Board in 1978, including Barse, Wallace, and Zappone, gave prepared statements to the *Montgomery Journal*, “13 School Board Candidates Speak Out...” August 23, 1978, A8.

<sup>77</sup> In 1962 the candidates did not promise to remove Superintendent Taylor Whittier, although they did ask him to leave a year after their election. In 1978, according to Bernardo’s existing contract, which was to expire on September 30 of 1979, he was required one year’s notice about whether it was to be renewed. The Board voted in the summer of 1978 to renew his contract by a vote of 5 to 2, with Marian Greenblatt and Elizabeth Spencer voting against renewal. In other words, the conservative candidates promised to remove Bernardo even though he had just received a 4-year extension. When they did vote to renew him the county was plunged into a year of legal battling; Bernardo eventually left in late 1979. *Montgomery Journal*, July 13, 1978, A-5.

while suggesting that school closures/reorganizations and the Action Steps were targeted appeals to African-Americans that potentially came at the expense of white students.

By opposing the school closures/reorganizations and the Action Steps, the conservative candidates for School Board in 1978 addressed race relations in a way that their predecessors in 1962 had not done.<sup>78</sup> During the campaign, Barse pandered to aggrieved parents in the down-county area, complaining that “schools are being closed, ‘clustered,’ and threatened. Community is pitted against community as the Board decides which schools to close ... no money is saved by closings.” Wallace and Zappone, in their emphasis on a return to the basics, also criticized the “magnet” programs, early education centers, and other educational innovations the Board had implemented as part of the reorganization of the down-county schools. From an educationally conservative perspective, the reorganization policies were a wasteful example of experimental progressive education, while the Action Steps privileged one group of students over the collective good.

Barse, Zappone and Wallace ran as a slate and all three won seats on the Board, a surprising show of support for a bloc of candidates, since in recent years voters had tended to ignore slates and vote for a mixture of candidates.<sup>79</sup> A jubilant

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<sup>78</sup> As discussed in Chapters Two and Three, desegregation in Montgomery County had proceeded relatively smoothly. There were some small instances of resistance, and members of the black community grumbled about the administration’s decision not to hire more black teachers and administrators during the first few years of the process. But the 1962 campaign for the School Board, which pitted educational and economic conservatives against liberals did not include an element of pro-segregation rhetoric or playing on racial attitudes by the conservative candidates. Local media coverage did not mention any race-based appeals, and histories of the 1962 race for School Board also do not include any acknowledgement that race played a part of the campaign.

<sup>79</sup> The *Montgomery Journal* called the vote “unprecedented;” apparently its writers had forgotten the 1962, 64, and 66 elections, discussed in Chapter 3, which had all featured victories by

Greenblatt commented that “there have been a lot of 6-to-1 votes on the Board, and the people have said that maybe I’m right after all.”<sup>80</sup> After the election the new Board immediately moved to take action on HR-18. On December 18, at a Board meeting packed with black and white supporters of the mandatory professional development course, Zappone proposed a resolution to make the course voluntary. The audience responded with jeers, insults, and cries of “racism” as Greenblatt, who had been elected President of the new Board, pounded the gavel in an attempt to maintain order. The Board tabled the HR-18 issue until January 18 but strongly hinted they would make the course a voluntary, and not mandatory, part of professional development.<sup>81</sup> Frank Morris, the education committee chairman of the local NAACP, departed the meeting deeply concerned. “We’re engaged in a confrontation,” he said. “It’s them (the new school board majority) against us and the black community.”<sup>82</sup>

On January 8, the NAACP staged a large rally and local black leaders pledged to fight the Board’s anticipated decision through picketing, letter-writing, and perhaps attempting to convince federal authorities to deny the county federal funding due to a hostile racial atmosphere. The *Montgomery County Sentinel* asked in an editorial whether “the views of the majority of four” School Board members represented those of Montgomery County’s population and argued that HR-18, along with the other

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slates of candidates. See *Montgomery Journal* “Out’s Win Schools Race,” November 8, 1978. There were actually four seats up for election in 1978, with incumbent Elizabeth Spencer, a liberal, winning reelection. All of the winning candidates secured at least 55,000 votes, while the nearest losing candidate earned around 52,000.

<sup>80</sup> *Washington Post*, “‘Outside’ Slate Takes Three School Seats,” November 8, 1978, A26.

<sup>81</sup> *Montgomery Journal*, “Nix Views School Board,” December 22, 1978.

<sup>82</sup> *Montgomery Sentinel*, “Blacks Challenge New School Board,” December 21, 1978.

Action Steps, had helped black parents overcome their suspicions of the system and “have confidence it could serve them equally.”<sup>83</sup> On January 18, a mixed-race crowd of over 600 jammed the Board of Education’s meeting; a local paper speculated that this might have been the largest crowd ever to attend a Board meeting that wasn’t focused on the budget. 36 of the 40 people who spoke urged the Board not to make HR-18 voluntary, charging that the Board had misread the public and did not have a mandate to take that action. When, towards the end of the meeting, the Board voted 4 to 3 in favor of making the course voluntary, scores of citizens stormed out angrily, while others linked arms and sang “We Shall Overcome.”<sup>84</sup>

Although the election of Barse, Wallace and Zappone to the School Board represented a victory for educational conservatives, in an important way the electoral results in 1978 were distinctly different from those in 1962. During the first conservative takeover of the Board, economic conservatives had played a major role in the election for both School Board and County Council. Lowering taxes and cutting the budget of the school system had been joined with criticism of “frills” by the educational and economic conservatives in 1962 as the candidates won victory. In 1978, the economic conservative activists were even more motivated than they had been in 1962 because they had a national “taxpayer’s revolt” to help them as they presented their message to the public. But the local economic conservatives did not link their push for a ballot initiative known as TRIM (Tax Relief in Montgomery) and

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<sup>83</sup> *Montgomery Sentinel* “Support Black Studies,” January 18, 1979.

<sup>84</sup> *Montgomery Journal* “600 Jam Board of Ed,” January 19, 1979. *Montgomery Journal*, “Black Studies Made Voluntary,” January 19, 1979. In a feeble attempt at a compromise, the Board did vote to make HR-18 mandatory for all new hires, but this fell far short of what many activists wanted.

modeled after California's Proposition 13, with the educational conservatism of the School Board candidates.

Proposition 13, Howard Jarvis' campaign to amend California's state constitution, was approved by voters in the spring of 1978, garnering national media attention, and local anti-tax activists in Montgomery County immediately sought to capitalize on the momentum. One of these was Karl Schlotterbeck, a retired economist who had worked for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Brookings Institution. In contrast to the hard-charging Jarvis, Schlotterbeck had a calm and low-key manner. He prided himself on choosing his words carefully and came across "more like a grandfatherly pediatrician than an 'I'm mad as hell' taxpayer," according to the *Washington Post*.<sup>85</sup> In 1975 he and some like-minded county residents had founded the Taxpayer's League in the basement of at Bethesda office building. Schlotterbeck and the Taxpayer's League were the most recent incarnation of a strain of fiscally conservative citizens who had been active in Montgomery County politics for decades, periodically surfacing to influence elections or lobby the County Council against tax increases, as had occurred in December, 1967, just before the teacher strike.

During the mid-1970s, a few members Schlotterbeck's Taxpayer's League continued this method of activism by attending County Council meetings to argue for budget cuts. Occasionally they'd bring signs or placards with simple slogans like "Cut Spending Now" and stand outside the Council's hearing room; they took pictures and mailed them to local newspapers to try and get casual observers

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<sup>85</sup> *Washington Post*, "Tax-Cut Advocate: They Are Listening To Him Now," 8/17/78. MCA, Elections Materials, Folder: Campaign to Defeat TRIM – the Fair Share Coalition.

interested in their cause. The local media showed little interest in reporting the League's activities until the passage of Proposition 13 in California. Suddenly, as the *Washington Post* reported, "the 'outs' were 'ins.'" National coverage of California's taxpayer revolt encouraged Schlotterbeck and members of the Taxpayer's League to draft their own initiative and work to gather signatures in July of 1978. Charles Sutton, a member of the League, noted that with "the horse of the century standing at the door, we'd have been damn fools if we hadn't ridden him for all it's worth."<sup>86</sup>

Schlotterbeck drafted a proposal called the Tax Relief in Montgomery initiative, or TRIM, as an amendment to the county Charter. TRIM stipulated that the County's property tax rate be lowered from the current rate of \$2.60 per \$100 of assessed valuation in FY 1979 to a rate of \$2.25 per \$100. This figure could only be increased if six of the seven Council members voted to exceed that level by declaring an emergency and calling a public hearing.<sup>87</sup> As news of TRIM spread, interested county residents contacted Schlotterbeck to ask where they could sign the petition, and League officials converted these inquiring individuals into volunteers to round up the signatures of their friends and neighbors.<sup>88</sup> Membership in the League swelled to over 1,200 members, and in just a few weeks the activists surprised local political

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<sup>86</sup> *Washington Post*, "Tax-Cut Advocate: They Are Listening To Him Now," 8/17/78. MCA, Elections Materials, Folder: Campaign to Defeat TRIM – the Fair Share Coalition.

<sup>87</sup> In practice, this meant that a determined minority of 2 out of 7 Council members could prevent any tax increase. Memorandum to the Montgomery County Council from Arthur W. Spengler, Deputy Council Staff Director, July 10, 1978, 1-2. MCA, Elections Materials, Folder: Elections 1978 Amendments and Ballot Questions (TRIM).

<sup>88</sup> *Washington Post*, "Tax-Cut Advocate: They Are Listening To Him Now," August 17, 1978. MCA, Elections Materials, Folder: Campaign to Defeat TRIM – the Fair Share Coalition.

observers by collecting 29,000 signatures – three times the number needed to put their TRIM measure on the November ballot.<sup>89</sup>

There was no doubt that if TRIM were to pass, the public schools would bear the brunt of the reduction in revenues. During the 1960s and 1970s, a combination of population growth, inflation, and public demand for more services had combined in Montgomery County to propel the growth of the public sector.<sup>90</sup> The total county budget had grown from \$210 million in 1970 to \$568 million in 1979, an increase of 170% that was more than two and a half times the rate of inflation over the same period.<sup>91</sup> Around half of the budget in 1979, \$281.4 million, was allocated to the Board of Education for the operation of the Montgomery County Public Schools.<sup>92</sup> Kenneth Muir, a spokesman for the School Board, noted the change in mood among the population, noting in September “it’s like a Proposition 13 fever out here.”<sup>93</sup> He

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<sup>89</sup> *Washington Post*, “A Long Road to Respectability: Evolution of Montgomery’s Tax Revolt,” November 6, 1978, C1. Also, a recap of the ballot measure’s surprising rise and rapid fall noted how political observers in the county did not anticipate the measure gaining any support prior to the League’s successful gathering of signatures. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, “TRIM Grabs Defeat from the Jaws of Victory,” December 27, 1978. MCA, Elections Materials, Folder: Campaign to Defeat TRIM – the Fair Share Coalition.

<sup>90</sup> Another contributing factor had been public employee unionization; the county’s teachers, following the strike in 1968 had led the way in this regard, but during the 1970s policemen, firefighters, and other county employees also secured collective bargaining rights. A County Council press release noted that Montgomery County had been “free of scandal and corruption” and its government had “generally reflected the demands of an informed citizenry for efficient and responsible service.” The Montgomery County Council, “The Taxpayer’s Revolt and Charter Amendments,” 2. MCA, Elections Materials, Folder: Elections 1978 Amendments and Ballot Questions (TRIM).

<sup>91</sup> These figures were cited by County Councilmen William G. Colman and John L. Menke, in July of 1978. After the Taxpayer’s League succeeded in getting TRIM on the ballot, Menke and Colman proposed their own tax-cap measure which did not go as far as TRIM but identified the significant growth of the public sector in recent years as putting undue strain on taxpayers. “Statement by Councilmen William G. Colman and John L. Menke, July 20, 1978, 4. MCA, Elections Materials, Folder: Elections 1978 Amendments and Ballot Questions (TRIM).

<sup>92</sup> MCA, County Council Printed Materials, Annual Reports, Annual Report 1978, 5.

<sup>93</sup> Muir was commenting, in part, on the fact that anti-tax sentiment had always resided among a small section of the population, but that for the first time the attitude seemed to be widespread. Part

told the media that at least \$25 million would be immediately cut from the schools budget if TRIM were to pass, with more significant cuts likely to follow.<sup>94</sup>

In October, a group of seventeen different education, civil rights, citizen, and labor groups came together to form a new organization, the Fair Share Coalition, to work for the defeat of the TRIM amendment.<sup>95</sup> Former County Councilman Norman Christeller and former School Board President Thomas Israel headed the Coalition; Hank Heller, the current head of the MCEA, was the Coalition's treasurer.<sup>96</sup> These leaders mobilized hundreds of teachers, labor organizers, senior citizens, civil rights activists, and even students to work to defeat TRIM. They were joined by the Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations, the Board of Education, the local NAACP, and several other organizations and government agencies in their opposition to TRIM.<sup>97</sup>

This was an impressive display of unity, especially because it occurred even as the NAACP and MCEA were fighting over HR-18, and as many county residents

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of the evidence for this was that, until late in the fall of 1978, no significant opposition to TRIM had emerged by way of an umbrella organization uniting various local groups and activists. The Fair Share Coalition would finally fill that void when it announced its formation in October. *Washington Post*, "Fight over Tax Rollback Heats Up in Montgomery," 9/23/78, C1.

<sup>94</sup> *Washington Post*, "Fight over Tax Rollback Heats Up in Montgomery," 9/23/78, C1.

<sup>95</sup> *Montgomery Journal*, "Major Opposition to TRIM Getting Organized," 10/18/78, A1. MCA, Elections Materials, Folder: Campaign to Defeat TRIM – the Fair Share Coalition.

<sup>96</sup> Schlotterbeck complained about the leaders of the Fair Share Coalition being "two former top-level bureaucrats," and the *Journal* identified them as Christeller and Israel. *Montgomery Journal*, "The Hottest Issue – To TRIM or Not To Trim," November 3, 1978. MCA, Elections Materials, Folder: Campaign to Defeat TRIM – the Fair Share Coalition. Christeller had served on the Council during the mid-1970s; ironically, he was known as a budget hawk who made significant cuts to the overall budget, and the schools budget, while serving on the Council. MCA, RG 16, Series III, Box 1, 35-37. After serving as head of MCEA, Hank Heller was elected to the Maryland House of Delegates and served for several terms in the 1980s and 90s.

<sup>97</sup> The list of organizations who were part of the Fair Share Coalition, as well as groups allied with them, are recounted in the profile on Schlotterbeck. *Washington Post* "A Long Road to Respectability: Evolution of Montgomery's Tax Revolt," November 6, 1978, C1.



were listening to the conservative educational prescriptions of Barse, Wallace, and Zappone. Although the divisions between groups of people in Montgomery County had seemed to grow wider during the postwar decades, when confronted with the real possibility of prohibitively large cuts to the school system budget, many county residents managed to find common cause. The difference of opinion between blacks and teachers over the professional development course was significant, but neither blacks nor teachers wanted to see 10 percent of the schools budget immediately cut if TRIM passed. Activists from various groups, even as they nurtured distinct educational visions, continued to agree that good schools were worth fighting for.

Although the three educational conservative candidates for the School Board were also fiscal conservatives who publicly supported TRIM, Schlotterbeck and the Taxpayer's League did not effectively refute charges that the ballot measure would result in significant budgetary reductions. The Fair Share Coalition blanketed the county with flyers detailing the cuts that would result were TRIM to pass, using the public schools as a key distribution mechanism. High school students were given a pamphlet with the scary headline "If Question E Wins – Students Lose."<sup>98</sup> The flyers pointed to the drastic cuts that California school boards had made in the wake of Proposition 13; even with surpluses to cushion the blow, thousands of employees were fired, class sizes were increased, and the length of the school day was trimmed. Unlike California, which had a budget surplus, Montgomery County faced a budget deficit, meaning the cuts would be deeper. The flyer urgently pleaded: "to preserve the excellence of our school system, as well as improve educational opportunities ...

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<sup>98</sup> TRIM was officially known as Question E on the ballot; there were six different proposed amendments being voted on that year, and they were identified with letters A through F. Everyone in the county knew that Question E was TRIM.

PLEASE VOTE ON NOVEMBER 7 AND VOTE NO ON QUESTION E.” In smaller type across the bottom, the flyer brought home by students included a disclaimer: “if you can’t vote give this to your parents.”<sup>99</sup> That advice seemed particularly obvious for the children at North Chevy Chase Elementary School, where the PTA distributed a variation of the same flyer to the children on Thursday, November 2, the week before the election.<sup>100</sup>

Schlotterbeck denounced the characterizations of cuts depicted by the Coalition as “false,” claiming the cutbacks were “exaggerated” and accusing the Coalition of engaging in “real scare tactics.”<sup>101</sup> Schlotterbeck pointed out that most of the members of the Coalition were themselves “the chief beneficiaries” of government spending, and thus their opposition was grounded in the very real material threat that the ballot measure posed to continuing business as usual.<sup>102</sup> This may have been true, but Schlotterbeck and other supporters of TRIM were largely silent when it came to the subject what should be cut from the budget. Art Spengler, a budget analyst for the County Council, noted the week before the election that he had not heard any candidate or TRIM supporter outline exactly what they would cut to make up the estimated \$26 million reduction in revenue that TRIM would

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<sup>99</sup> Flyer “If Question E Wins – Students Lose.” MCA, Elections Materials, Folder: Campaign to Defeat TRIM – the Fair Share Coalition.

<sup>100</sup> *Montgomery Journal* “The Hottest Issue – To TRIM or Not to Trim,” November 3, 1978, A2. MCA, Elections Materials, Folder: Campaign to Defeat TRIM – the Fair Share Coalition.

<sup>101</sup> *Montgomery Journal* “The Hottest Issue – To TRIM or Not to Trim,” November 3, 1978, A2. MCA, Elections Materials, Folder: Campaign to Defeat TRIM – the Fair Share Coalition.

<sup>102</sup> *Montgomery Journal* “The Hottest Issue – To TRIM or Not to Trim,” November 3, 1978, A2. MCA, Elections Materials, Folder: Campaign to Defeat TRIM – the Fair Share Coalition.

necessitate.<sup>103</sup> Unlike the economic conservatives in 1962, who had worked with educational activists to identify specific examples of “waste” or “frills” in county public services, the Taxpayer’s League simply assumed that a straightforward appeal to the economic self-interest of taxpaying county residents would convince voters to support TRIM.<sup>104</sup> This was an important failure by Schlotterbeck because it allowed the Fair Share Coalition to identify specific programs and services that would be cut, schools being the most important of these. Even as Barse, Wallace, and Zappone won their seats on the School Board in November by running as educational

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<sup>103</sup> There was in fact significant dispute about just how big the reduction in revenues would be. According to the Taxpayer’s League, TRIM would reduce county revenues by about \$26 million and save individual taxpayers about \$100 per home. The League also believed the budget shortfall for FY 1980 would be about \$9 million, for a total of \$35 million fewer dollars in the county’s coffers, about a six percent reduction; in FY 1979 the county’s operating budget was \$568 million. But TRIM was ambiguously worded, and some people thought that TRIM might apply to “special” property taxes as well as the general property tax. These included specific taxes on property in certain districts within the county, mostly in the down-county area, in relation to the extra services these districts received. These special taxes included areas like transit, fire, advance land acquisition, metropolitan and regional planning, recreation, funding for the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission, storm draining, and parking lot district taxes. Although these “special” taxes averaged only about \$1 per \$100 of assessed valuation, the wording of TRIM did not specify if this amount was to be counted as part of the \$2.25 cap on property taxes. If TRIM did not apply to these categories, the extra \$1 could be assessed above the \$2.25 on appropriate properties. If TRIM did apply, then the \$1 would have to be *part of* the \$2.25, which for all intents and purposes meant that those special taxes would be eliminated entirely. If TRIM did apply to the special categories, the budget shortfall was projected to be as large as \$100 million. Moreover, some county officials disputed the League’s estimate of a \$9 million budget deficit for FY 1980 and said the figure could be closer to \$21 million. In other words: pro-TRIM advocates said that TRIM would reduce the county budget by \$35 million, while anti-TRIM advocates said the reduction would be \$121 million. Both sides trotted out competing numbers all summer and fall, adding to the confusion of an already hotly contested election season. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, “How Much Would TRIM Cut?” November 2, 1978, B-5. MCA, Elections Materials, Folder: Campaign to Defeat TRIM – The Fair Share Coalition. Also see *Montgomery Journal* “The Hottest Issue – To TRIM or Not to Trim,” November 3, 1978, A2. MCA, Elections Materials, Folder: Campaign to Defeat TRIM – the Fair Share Coalition.

<sup>104</sup> In addition to traditional forms of campaigning, there were reports of some young people, possibly students, engaging in what pro-TRIM activists labeled “goon squad tactics” regarding lawn signage in favor of TRIM. During the last few weeks of the campaign, hundreds of yard signs urging support for the tax-cap measure had been torn down, and Schlotterbeck later implied that this had been done by youths with the implicit, and possibly explicit, encouragement of anti-TRIM activists. A letter to the editor of the *Montgomery Journal* on November 29, 1978 by Schlotterbeck opened with this allegation of vandalism by students; Schlotterbeck strongly implied that the students had been instructed to engage in these activities by adults, including their teachers, who were anti-TRIM activists. MCA, Elections Materials, Folder: Campaign to Defeat TRIM – the Fair Share Coalition.

conservatives, TRIM failed to pass by a margin of about 5,000 votes out of more than 147,000 cast.<sup>105</sup>

As 1978 drew to a close by some measures the school system was better than ever. Test scores were at an all-time high, class sizes had been kept down (thanks, in part, to the declining school-aged population), and the overall graduation rate had increased.<sup>106</sup> A comprehensive study and report on the senior high school program had recently been completed and included an overwhelmingly positive review of the current state of the county's high schools.<sup>107</sup> Yet on the other hand, a poll of the county's residents taken in early 1980 found that around 40% of respondents gave the school system a grade of C, D or F when asked to provide an overall assessment. Only 60% of respondents thought that the Montgomery County Public Schools were superior to others across the nation. 42% said that schools were better than they used to be, but almost as many, 38%, said they were worse.<sup>108</sup> County residents noted that they wanted more emphasis on the basics, better teachers, and smaller class sizes, but beyond those specific concerns, the mixed reviews given to the schools were a

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<sup>105</sup> "TRIM grabs defeat from the jaws of victory," *Sentinel*, December 27, 1978, MCA, Elections Materials, Folder: Campaign to Defeat TRIM – the Fair Share Coalition.

<sup>106</sup> MCA, RG 13: Office of Public Information, Box 12, Tape 423, "Board of Education Budget," 12/31/78. Charles Bernardo, after the election and facing the new (and hostile) Board, gamely went on the Montgomery County Comments radio program to emphasize what was good about the school system he oversaw. Although his comments were tempered by ongoing budgetary restraints, and were peppered with examples of how money was being spent "in classrooms" (echoing the theme of the conservative candidates who had won seats on the Board), he spoke confidently about the overall excellence of the school system.

<sup>107</sup> MCA, BOE Printed, "Final Report: Senior High School Study," June, 1978, 3-2, also 1-1, 1-2.

<sup>108</sup> MCA, RG 13: Office of Public Information, Box 13, Tape 476, "Public Opinion Survey of MCPS," 3/30/80.

troubling new development in Montgomery County.<sup>109</sup> During the period between the World Wars, when Superintendent Edwin Broome had been in charge of the MCPS, there was near-unanimity regarding its excellence. By the late 1970s, this widespread agreement had been replaced by uncertainty and discontent.

That discontent surfaced during the 1978 election season. Some white residents were upset about the school closures and reorganizations, as well as the Action Steps, because they believed these privileged black students at the expense of whites. Teachers resented the HR-18 course they felt prioritized the Action Steps over their own right to collectively bargain their contract. Black parents and community leaders were outraged when the newly-elected conservative majority on the School Board began to deemphasize the Action Steps. The Board's decisions to remove Superintendent Bernardo from office, in the spring of 1979, angered some liberals in the community who supported Bernardo's progressive educational initiatives. Economic conservatives, meanwhile, were dismayed that the failure of TRIM meant that the educational bureaucracy was all but certain to continue growing. Although the conservative majority on the Board between 1978 and 1980 attempted to rein in spending somewhat, as had been the case in the mid-1960s, conservative control of the Board was a temporary aberration; liberal candidates quickly reassumed control of the School Board in the early 1980s.

There were no winners after the 1978 election; everyone felt somewhat disappointed and frustrated about the state of the county's schools. Although

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<sup>109</sup> *Washington Post* "Schools Given Passing Grades," Feb 21, 1980, MD9. School officials, and the *Post*'s headline writers, attempted to spin the survey results positively. Ken Muir, from the Office of Information, compared the attitudes of Montgomery residents to the results of a recent Gallup poll that, in general, rated schools lower.

Montgomery County's schools were, as they had been in the early 1940s, well-funded and excellent by many measures, the democratization of educational politics had prompted citizens to be more uncertain about the quality and trajectory of the system than they had been in the past. The liberal activists who pushed for the elected School Board in the late 1940s had wanted to bring the schools closer to the people so that they might reflect the people's desires. In this they had succeeded: the school system and the public's attitude about that system in the late 1970s reflected the many different opinions, values, and interests of the diverse Montgomery County population.

**Conclusion:  
Consequences and Reverberations of Contested Educational Politics**

The publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 was a major turning point in the national discussion about education. Debates about good schools, and the unsatisfactory resolution of those debates, during the 1970s contributed to growing sense of uncertainty and unease about education among parents and other concerned citizens. The damning assessment of American education reached by the Commission on Excellence in Education – “the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people” – was repeated in national media outlets and became widely accepted.<sup>1</sup> Mediocrity was unacceptable to many Americans, as was the idea that foreign children were outperforming Americans on standardized tests in traditional subjects. The perceived crisis in American education needed to be addressed by significant reform.

Politicians, school officials and parents reached for more easily-understood and purportedly objective numerical evaluations of success to help reassure themselves about the quality of the schools. It seemed as though the tension between competing educational visions could be resolved by relying on measurements and evaluations of educational achievement based on hard data and verifiable evidence. Student performance on standardized test scores became the single most important indicator of a school’s success or failure, an educational trend that became federal policy with the passage of the No Child Left Behind legislation in 2001. The impulse

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<sup>1</sup> National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk* (Washington, D.C.,: US Government Printing Office, 1983), 5.

to quantify and assess educational quality was in some respects an attempt to resolve the misunderstanding and miscommunication among various activist groups and their different educational visions that had occurred during the postwar decades. Firm and unambiguous measurements of good schools were desirable because they helped to quell the disagreements that arose when concerned people came together to discuss public schooling.

The conservative educational philosophy, emphasizing traditional instruction in “the basics,” lent itself to straightforward evaluation in terms of student test scores, and this philosophy emerged victorious in many school districts across the country. Today many public schools spend months during the spring semester drilling students in preparation for the standardized tests in reading and mathematics administered in April and May. Parents spend billions of dollars annually on private tutors and test-prep courses to help their students score high on these tests and the SAT, and colleges increasingly rely on standardized test results to sort through the ever-growing number of applications they receive.<sup>2</sup> A good school in America today is a school where students perform well on standardized tests; this is the most widely-accepted definition of educational quality in cities, suburbs, and rural communities across the nation.

If the conservative educational vision emerged victorious, the progressive educational program promoted by liberals has lost the most in terms of public acceptance. The idea that public schools should cultivate critical thinking in children to prepare them to be active and responsible members of a democratic republic, or

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<sup>2</sup> In 2009, a National Association for College Admission Counseling report found that “about 2 million students spend about 2.5 billion dollars a year on test preparation and tutoring, including the SAT” *The Wall Street Journal*, “SAT Coaching Found to Boost Scores -- Barely,” May 20, 2009, D1.



could introduce students to the complicated nuances of living in a dynamic society and world, seems incompatible with the curricula and pedagogies deployed most public schools today. Somewhat ironically, the liberal preference for scientific management of public institutions was adopted by conservatives demanding objective data to prove the worthiness of educational programs. The progressive educational vision that liberals implemented in places like Montgomery County in the mid-twentieth century continues to exist in private schools and the occasional upper-level elective in some public high schools, but has largely fallen out of favor.

African American activists promoting their vision of educational equality for black children succeeded in some ways during the late twentieth century. Jonathan Zimmerman and other scholars have noted that blacks were unable to fundamentally change the curriculum but did manage to introduce several black figures into textbooks and reading lists.<sup>3</sup> Also, affirmative action hiring and professional development policies succeeded in changing the racial makeup of faculties and administrations in schools across the nation, providing better employment opportunities for blacks and other minorities. But although these stand as real accomplishments and measures of success, black leaders continue to struggle to provide black children with a high quality public educational program. Part of the problem is geographic segregation of people along racial and economic lines; the home and community lives of many impoverished young black people is a challenge

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<sup>3</sup> Zimmerman is somewhat disappointed by this; he had hoped that by challenging the master narrative blacks might have been able to alter that narrative's triumphant-progression-toward-greatness orientation. Instead, he concludes, blacks "settled" for having a few of their heroes included in the triumphant narrative. I think that Zimmerman sells short the black accomplishment of colorizing American history textbooks; students today have a much more detailed and thorough understanding of slavery, the Jim Crow South, and the African-American experience in general than most people would have imagined possible only a few decades ago. Jonathan Zimmerman *Whose America?: Culture Wars in the Public Schools* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

that public schools, by themselves, are largely helpless to confront. The black vision of educational equality is part of a larger struggle for equality for blacks that will not be solved by education reform but, perhaps, may be addressed in other ways.

Teachers have fared poorly during the thirty years since *A Nation at Risk* was published. The emphasis on student standardized test scores has reduced the job of teachers to be little more than a taskmaster who drills students in the material and mechanisms of test-taking. This is not the kind of autonomy in the classroom and professional respect that teachers went on strike to achieve during the 1960s, nor is it a particularly inviting profession for ambitious and creative young people. Having their ability and efficacy reduced to a student's performance on a standardized test is demoralizing to many teachers, in part because a teacher can only do so much to affect student test scores. The educational attainment and wealth of a student's parents, as well as numerous other external factors in the student's life and upbringing, seem to be important indicators of a student's performance on a test. Quality teachers are important as well, but many reformers today see teacher quality as some kind of magic bullet that could fix every education problem, a position that ignores the myriad educational disadvantages that many children bring with them through the schoolhouse door.

The recent blaming of public employee unions, including teachers, for state budget shortfalls is another distressing development; teachers are watching the health benefits, pensions, and job security they worked years to attain be whittled away by cost-conscious bureaucrats, politicians, and voters. In some respects, teachers became victims of their own success. The power teachers displayed in the 1960s and

1970s in places like Montgomery County, by striking and by becoming more involved in electoral politics at both the local and national level, contributed to the public perception that teachers were an “interest group” out to secure benefits for themselves. Many reformers today are taking aim at teacher unions and hope to convince the public that eschewing longtime union-backed policies like seniority-based pay scales and tenure will motivate teachers to focus on student learning and improve student test scores. It remains to be seen whether teachers can remain organized and unified in the face of the current economic and educational hard times, and it also is unclear what will happen to the teaching profession if the unions and associations are successfully neutered.

More broadly, public opinion on the state of education in America is low, and suggestions about the proper way to fix them are so numerous as to overwhelm.<sup>4</sup> Market-based solutions are currently promoted by reformers from both political parties; similarly, a stubborn consensus about using standardized test scores as the single most important measurement of a school (or a teacher’s) quality persists in the minds of many policymakers, activists, and citizens. There continues to be vague agreement that good schools are desirable, but discussions about how to achieve this goal today seem to start from a depressing acknowledgement that excellence likely unattainable. This appears to be the biggest casualty of the last half-century of educational politics: people have come to expect very little from public school systems. Increasingly, members of or aspirants to the middle class – the kind of

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<sup>4</sup> As noted in the Introduction, a June 2011 poll by Pew Research Center revealed that 47% of surveyed adults said that they education system in this country requires "major changes" and another 19% said it needed to be "completely rebuilt" Pew Research Center for the People & the Press Poll, June 2011. It seems like a new book, documentary film, or in-depth magazine feature on about the crisis in American education appears every few months.

people who moved to Montgomery County in large numbers during the baby boom, in part because of the excellent public schools – are relying on quasi-public charter schools or private or parochial educations for their children.

The vision of schools as a public good, well-funded by taxpayer dollars and available to everyone, seems somewhat outmoded today. Not only is the public's appetite for higher taxes perceived to be very low, but people seem skeptical that public institutions like schools can be efficient and productive engines of societal improvement. The link between a well-educated population and a nation of industrious, responsible, and civic-minded individuals is not emphasized by politicians; instead, the sole purpose of secondary schools is to give students the chance to go to college. That there are thousands of professions and vocations that do not, or should not, require a college education, or that a high school diploma should certify more than mere mastery of a few basic levels of proficiency in reading and math, are ideas that have effectively been eradicated. By evaluating public secondary schools based on standardized test scores, we have not only accepted a very limited definition of "good schools;" we are also demonstrating limited faith in public institutions to our children. The schools they attend today may affect their notion of what is possible in the public sector, and the ambitious hopes for schools nurtured by mid-century residents in Montgomery County may seem like fantastic, utopian, pipe dreams.

But declining optimism about the potential of public schools was not an inevitable outcome of democratized educational politics, and there may be some reasons to hope that further shifts in attitude will occur in the future. In Montgomery

County, the school system changed more, in terms of curricular and pedagogical offerings, attention to African American concerns, conditions of employment for teachers, and in many other respects during the second half of the twentieth century than it had during the first half. This dynamism could perhaps be spun positively, because regardless of how people feel about public schools, the historical record demonstrates that change is possible. The history of tinkering with school systems is evidence that dedicated activists can get results, even if these successes are often incomplete and ephemeral.

The public once loved their schools, and they could love them again. The hegemony of the conservative educational vision that dominates our national educational discourse today is no more stable than the progressive educational vision that seemed universal in the 1950s. The first step toward changing how people think about public schools is developing alternative educational philosophies and working to see them implemented. Democratic mechanisms give activists a chance to change the trajectory of our public schools and the way that people think about them. Over time, perhaps, a different understanding of good schools may emerge triumphant. It will not resolve the debate about educational excellence once and for all, but it may affect the way a new generation of young Americans thinks and learns. That goal seems worth fighting for, and local school districts across the country provide arenas where people can work to promote alternative visions of educational excellence.

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## Archives and Primary Source Collections

### **Montgomery County Archives**

The Montgomery County Archives was operated until 2010 by the Montgomery County Historical Society. This rich collection, organized into various Record Groups and Series, was comprised of a wide range of materials including: correspondence of public officials; printed materials like annual reports, committee reports and other studies; internal memoranda; transcripts from oral history interviews performed by the League of Women Voters during the 1970s; audio recordings of public affairs programming; photographs; campaign materials, voter guides and election results; drafts of committee reports and studies; meeting minutes; and other miscellanea relating to various agencies in Montgomery County Government from the 1940s thru the 1980s. The collection was originally housed at several different local county governmental agencies as well as in county public libraries before being consolidated, organized, and catalogued in the 1990s.

Because of the sprawling nature of the collection, below is a listing of source materials consulted and cited in this dissertation, organized by the title of the Record Group or, in some cases, by Subject. Additionally, the Elections Materials and the Board of Education Printed Materials were unprocessed and not officially part of the Archives, but the archivist generously made them available to me. The Montgomery County Historical Society closed the Archives due to lack of funding and acceptable storage space in 2010. For information on the present state of the collection and accessibility, please contact the Montgomery County Historical Society in Rockville, Maryland.

The Montgomery County Public Schools central office does not maintain an archive that is available to researchers.

Board of Education Printed Materials

Brookings Report Related Materials

Elections Materials

Office of the County Executive, 1968-1982

Office of the County Manager, 1954-1968

Office of Drug Control

Office of Public Information: Audio Recordings of “Montgomery County Comments,” public affairs programming, 1970-1980

League of Women Voters Materials

League of Women Voters Oral History Interviews and Transcripts

McKinsey Report Related Materials

Montgomery County Civic Federation Materials

Montgomery County Charter Committee Materials

Montgomery County Council Printed Materials

School Health Council Materials

### **Montgomery County Historical Society**

The Jane C. Sween Library is the principal research facility at the Montgomery County Historical Society. It is a non-circulating library and archives located at the Beall-Dawson Historical Park in Rockville, MD. The library includes some vertical files with newspaper clippings on various subjects, including public schools. The library also includes microfilm of local newspapers, including the *Montgomery County Sentinel*. The following published materials, referenced in this dissertation, are also available at the Sween Library.

Brookings Institution. *The Government of Montgomery County, Maryland: A Survey Made at the Request of the Board of County Commissioners*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1941.

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### **Montgomery County Education Association**

The MCEA does not maintain an official archive, and the association's records do not go back much further than the 1980s. However, during the early 1970s a graduate student at Heed University named John F. Freeman researched the 1968 teacher strike in Montgomery County for a master's thesis, and he later donated photocopies of the primary sources he gathered to the MCEA. These sources include internal MCEA correspondence, communication between MCEA and school officials, newspaper clippings, bulletins, press releases, photographs, and other materials. Freeman assembled these in (rough) chronological order in three three-ring binders and donated the binders to MCEA. In addition to Freeman's collection of original source materials, the MCEA also has a copy of an unpublished doctoral dissertation that focuses on the relationship between the School Board and the Association during the 1960s; this dissertation contains some valuable and relevant statistical information about the association during that decade.

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### **Montgomery County Federation of Teachers**

The MCFT does not maintain an official archive. The union was created in the mid-1960s, but following a brief spike in membership during the months before the teacher strike in 1968, the union quickly dwindled to become a very small organization. During the 1970s and 1980s the few dozen dedicated members worked

hard to maintain the union as an alternative to the Montgomery County Education Association, which maintained exclusive professional recognition from the Board of Education. The MCFT published a small newsletter, occasionally initiated membership drives, and engaged in other activities, but for all intents and purposes very few people outside of the union's own leadership was aware of or affected by their activities.

Joe Monte, who was present when the union was created in 1967, has served as president for the past decades, with Bill Welsh serving in various capacities as treasurer, secretary, vice president, etc. As of 2008, Monte was still working as a guidance counselor at Albert Einstein High School, while Welsh was retired and living near Rockville. Welsh kept a large box of materials at his home that he and Monte referred to as the MCFT "archives." This box contained materials dating back to the union's creation in the mid-1960s and continuing into the 1990s, including meeting minutes, official publications, copies of newsletters and other printed materials, photographs, correspondence, and other miscellanea. Bill Welsh allowed me to examine these materials, and to make photocopies of some of them. Copies of the MCFT-related source materials cited in this dissertation remain in my possession.

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