

Council members propose after-school increases

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By Ryan Gallagher
Staff Writer

Five County Council members proposed to increase the number of after-school programs offered at county middle schools and high schools as part of their ongoing effort to keep students engaged both in and out of the classroom and prevent them from getting into trouble.

The proposal, which was unveiled Tuesday, would expand county after-school programs into all 38 middle schools as well as four high schools by next fall. The programs would pair recreational activities, such playing sports, with educational benefits like studying with a tutor.

Currently only 10 middle schools offer county after-school programs while Montgomery Blair High School has the only after-school "sports academy" program.

Council members proposed the expansion effort to offer kids a safe place to study and socialize after school. "After school programs improve academic achievement and behavior in school," said Council Member Marilyn Praisner (D-Dist. 4). "They engender better emotional adjustment and peer relationships

and reduce opportunities for youth crime and risky behaviors."

Montgomery County police officers warn parents that young teens get into the most trouble after school before their parents come home from work. Lt. Eric Burnett, media spokesman, said after-school programs are a good mechanism to keep children productive. "A number of kids have a number of hours where they're alone. Any after school program that can take up their time and create positive values is definitely going to be beneficial to the community," said Burnett.

The Rec Extra Program will be expanded into every county middle school because council members say that middle school students are prime targets for gang recruiters. The Rec Extra program offers various activities including flag football, basketball, STEP teams and even a cartooning instructional class. Students can also participate in weekend activities such as white water rafting, camping trips and rock climbing. The cost to expand the Rec Extra program into every middle school for four days a week, along with transportation fees, will be \$1,127,030.

The four participating high

schools will offer similar programs to what Montgomery Blair High School currently has in place with their "Blair Sports Academy." The academy offers students who have a grade point average below 2.0 study help with a teacher or tutor for one hour after school to help them prepare for tests. Then students get to play sports and games as an incentive to stay involved in the program. Each program will be tailored to fit each school's specific needs and available resources. Program fees vary by school, but each program will cost more than \$295,000.

Wheaton, Albert Einstein, Springbrook and Paint Branch High School are proposed to implement the program, but council members hope to offer it to more high schools further down the road once the program is firmly in place.

Councilman Tom Perez (D-Dist. 5) said that with today's increasing demands and workaholic schedules, the program will help supervise kids when parents can't be at home. Said Perez, "As we transform our county, we have so many working families where parents are working two and three jobs, that we have to be part of the village that will help raise our children."