

## Testimony at Board of Education Meeting on July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and board members,

My name is Cheng Tu. I am a father of two MCPS students and a small business owner based in Rockville. First, I would like to welcome our new superintendent Dr. Jack Smith. I salute you sir for choosing to be an educator and your dedication to public service. I hope MCPS will be greatly improved under your leadership.

I have been a Maryland resident for twenty one years and among them, seventeen years in Montgomery County. My wife and I decided to live in Montgomery County because of its highly educated population, well planned communities and a strong public education system. Recently, I have seen a worrisome trend and want to urge you to refocus on Excellence, one of the five core values for MCPS.

I have watched some BOE meeting videos and "Close the Achievement Gap" strikes me as the popular catch phrase nowadays. As a Leadership Montgomery graduate, and knowing the county's current public education challenges, I fully support MCPS' effort to close the achieve gap. **My main objective here is to urge you to put the same level of emphasis on "Excellence"**. In another word, don't sacrifice "Excellence" to achieve "Equity". Achieve both of them together!

There are some signs that MCPS Excellence is at risk. One parent told me recently that the number of MCPS high schools in national top 100 dropped from four to one. MCPS's recent decision to inflate the grading system does not strike me as to "raising the bar and setting high standards." As a business owner and a taxpayer, I **urge you to refocus on Excellence**. Any deviation from that will be detrimental to our County's future.

As a business owner, my understanding is that in today's economy, competition is global. MCPS must prepare our students to face the global competition. One example, when I graduated from college twenty five years ago, Microsoft was an American company and most employees were based in the US. Today, even though Microsoft headquarter is still based in Seattle, Washington, its footprint is everywhere. The company can tap into desirable talents anywhere in the world, just like they hired an Indian born and educated Mr. Nadella to be Microsoft's CEO. Our graduates are competing with students globally. We must prepare them to face the competition and win. It takes countless hours of learning to achieve excellence. Inflating grading system sent a wrong signal to our students, making it look like excellence could be easily achieved.

As a taxpayer, I am worried that once the downward spiral starts, it will be very difficult to stop. There are three possible outcomes and all of them are disastrous to MCPS:

- 1) Some parents will just leave for a neighboring county. Howard and Fairfax County are the two alternatives. Often these residents form the core tax base that Montgomery County relies on. Shrunken tax base will make any of MCPS's objectives unattainable.
- 2) Some parents will send their children to private schools. When that happens, the county leaders will receive stronger pressure to reduce the current property tax rate, which is pretty high. It will also lead to less resource for MCPS.
- 3) Some other parents will start to advocate charter schools. Charter schools are popular in DCPS. Regardless of charter school's effectiveness, it will certainly divert fund from MCPS system.

In conclusion, I am here today to testify because I love Montgomery County and feel it is my duty, as a first generation immigrant, to share my American experiences and to remind you, our elected officials, the trust we put on your shoulders to educate our children. Please make wise decisions and keep MCPS excellent for the years to come.

Thank you!