

May 9, 2016

To: Montgomery County Board of Education
Re: Written testimony at BOE meeting on May 10 2016

Dear President Durso and Members of the Board,

I am the parent of a current MCPS student. I am writing to you regarding the recommendation 3 (a) in the Choice Study.

My child is attending one of the MCPS Elementary Center Programs for the Highly Gifted (HGC). We only have good things to say about the program, the dedicated teachers and the wonderful students. Therefore, I am deeply concerned about what was recommended in the recent study conducted by the Metis report, in particularly recommendation 3 (a). I believed that utilizing different standards for different groups, such as group-specific norms or automatic admissions for students in the top 5-10% of sending elementary or middle schools, will jeopardize these excellent programs.

Many of the MCPS special academic programs are designed for the students whose special academic needs cannot be met otherwise in the regular public school programs. For example, according to MCPS website, HGC is “designed to meet the needs of highly gifted and motivated learners in mathematics, language arts, science, and social studies.” In our situation, before attending HGC, my daughter seemed never able to find the “right” curricula at school because she was consistently one or two grades above her grade level in both math and English. It was a great relief to us that finally there is place for her where she was met with the right academic challenge and peers who have similar needs.

She was not alone. Almost every kid in her HGC class has similar stories. We know one boy who was so bored before he got into HGC that he was acting up in the classroom. He was labeled with behavior problems and was advised to take medication to calm him down. At HGC, he transformed to a “normal” kid, focused, content and engaged. Apparently the real “medication” he needed was the right challenge in the classroom.

The unique learning needs are very real and personal to the gifted children and their families. These special group of students can only be categorized and identified by their learning needs, not race or social economic factors. If recommendation 3(a) were implemented, many of these kids who flourish in the HGC, such as this boy, would have been excluded from this program and never would have the opportunity to fully realize their potential.

Metis report stated that there are “significant racial and socioeconomic disparities in the enrollment and acceptance rates to academically selective programs”. However, there is no supporting evidence in the report that this is the result of MCPS selection criteria or process for these programs. In fact, the Metis report acknowledged MCPS’s direct effort in increasing

representation of all groups in these programs: “The district utilizes multiple indicators in the selection process that include, in addition to cognitive assessments, teacher recommendations and other school-based input, report card grades, unique student profiles, demographic data such as eligibility for free and reduced-price meals (FARMS), and the lack of an intellectual peer group at the home school.”

Furthermore, according to the Metis report, during focus groups, parents and staff identified too few seats, long bus rides and limited awareness among parents about the special academic programs as barriers to equitable access, NOT the selection process. Indeed, there is no logical connection between the findings and the recommendation 3(a) in Metis report.

Like many MCPS parents, I am proud of Montgomery Public Schools. In the past, the MCPS officials, teachers and community have made tremendous effort to make our school district one of the best in the country. Instead of excluding students based on their race or social economic status, please increase the seats of special academic programs, so that students who are ready for more rigorous academic challenge can get them. Please install these programs throughout the county and at home schools so that MCPS students do not have to commute two hours in order to get the education they deserve. Please focus on the education of the under-represented students at early ages, so they can reach the same standard of excellence as other groups.

Thank you!

Sincerely yours,

A MCPS parent.