

Dear Mr. Chairman, Board Members of Education, Superintendent, Parents and Students,

Good Morning! Thank you very much for give me the opportunity to speak here. Also I would like take this opportunity to thank Dr. Smith for his courageous and wise, I should say, decision to be the new Superintendent of MCPS. Welcome, Dr. Smith. My family and I wish you have a success and happy tenure here in MCPS.

My name is Jun Chen, a scientist turned entrepreneur. I am a parent of two wonderful MCPS students. The concern I want to express here is the trending phrase “closing the achievement gap” and some of the approaches has and intend to be taken. By doing that, it erodes the EXCELLENCE from MCPS system. At the same time, it would not truly narrow the GAP, and sometime even harm the ones you intend to help.

I was wholeheartedly support the idea of “closing the achievement gap” when I first read that years ago. But after years of experience with what really happened, I am concerned. To achieve the goal of closing the GAP, there are two ways to do that. One is bringing up the lower achiever which is what I thought should be. I did not realize that some people are trying to do the other way by bring down the higher achiever, or the third way, mask the gap by lowing the standard. Here are some examples of what I am talking about. Years ago, MCPS introduced a new testing called INVIEW, trying to replace the existing one for G/T screen. The result is a huge jump of number of kids with 99% rank, but the true gap still existed. More recently, MCPS eliminated the advance classes in the Math, with a curriculum 2.0 that claims can challenge everyone in the same class regardless of individual student level. We don't have the data yet, but I don't see that will help both end of spectrum in the same classroom. And now the choice study recommended that admission for the G/T and Magnet program should be using group norm (recommendation 3a). This is I would call it as “Ba Miao Zhu Zhang”, a Chinese proverb means “helping the sprout by pulling it up”. This will not close the Gap, and will further weaken the G/T and Magnet programs, the crown jewel of MCPS.

Helping disadvantaged students is not an easy task. It is a complexed problem. The choice study incorporated too few factors. I suggest we should do a more comprehensive study to find root and degree of the causes of this problem. I would love to be involved in such study if I am allowed. The another suggestion I have is using “dynamic grouping” to replace “in class differentiation”.

When my family and I moved to Montgomery county 19 years ago, one of the major deciding factor is the excellency of the public school, as education is the most important path for low income families to move up-ward socially and economically. We were not rich. In fact, we were qualified for Earning Income Credit. SO public education was our only option. As I grew with my kids through MCPS, I have mostly positive things to say about MCPS even though we did experience some negatives or even discrimination at times. While my younger one is heading for the high school senior class this fall, that means these changes will not affect my children, I still want to see improvement, not regression, of MCPS. Because here, Montgomery County, is my family's home.