

TESTIMONY ON MCPS STUDY OF CHOICE AND SPECIAL ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

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Good morning, members of board of education and staff from Montgomery County:

My name is Kang Chen. First I want to thank all county education staff for their many years of hard work toward earning MCPS a true national reputation. Today I am happy to share comments from myself and other parents from the community,

1. The key finding (KF) 1 (page iii) stated the special programs are not aligned to “equity”. However, the key education equity components of “fairness” and “inclusion” were not discussed in the report. The report (page i) showed roughly 20% (14.5% in choice and special academic programs and 5.2% in COSA) students have accessed the special programs without counting home school special programs (e.g., PYP, MYP and signature programs). Therefore, the percentage of access should be even higher than 20%. To our understandings, the existing multi-layered MCPS programs have addressed “fairness” and “inclusion” issues, at least to some extent.
2. The same “equity” issue flows to KF3, which criticized the academically selective programs for being racial and socioeconomic disparity. To our understanding, the consortia programs and home-school signature programs were created to be complementary to the selective ones. Identifying one program with disparity out of a set of many programs with probably no disparity (collectively 20+% enrollment), is not justified. Statistically you will always find disparity in one particular area using a magnified glass. The academically selective program at high school level is to fully prepare kids for college, and be more competitive in the future of their lives. If the admission is not merit based and restricting 5-10% from the sending schools, it will irreversibly hurt qualified kids at crucial HS age in development and damage the nation’s future leading potential in arts, science and technology. The more reasonable top-down

and bottom-up solutions are to increase the academic program size and strengthen the quality of educations in all 200 home schools.

3. As we all know, ultimately, the strongest learning forces come from students themselves and the coaching parents. Engaging the parents to education system might be more effective in reducing the achievement gap at school. President Obama demonstrated a nice example of parenthood.
4. The report summarized phase II of research, “benchmarking innovative, high quality program in other districts” (page ii) such as “Jefferson County Public School (JCPS)” (page ix). It is not clearly discussed in the report how well correlated or similar between JCPS and MCPS.
5. Finally, only 20 out of 36 schools offer special programs were surveyed (page iii). What type of statistical sampling method was adopted to ensure the narrow sampling truly reflecting the views and situations from students in all 200 schools?

In summary we hope the report can be improved for clarity and accuracy with all the conclusions being substantiated, and most importantly, the county policy will work for true equity without hurting any individuals. I appreciate your time listening to our comments.