

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL

Rolling Terrace Elementary School

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Community Forum, Fall 2009 at John F. Kennedy H.S.

To: MCPS Board of Education

Testimony of: Rolling Terrace E.S.

Representing: The Rolling Terrace Community

Good evening Board members, parents, MCPS staff, students and guests. MCPS has asked us all here today with a very important question: "During difficult economic times, what priorities in the Montgomery County Public Schools strategic plan should we focus on for the 2010-2011 school year to improve achievement for all students?" Our community at Rolling Terrace Elementary is grateful for the chance to share our views with the Board of Education on this issue.

The strategic plan for Montgomery County Public schools makes a pledge to the parents, students, staff, and communities they serve. This pledge includes:

- Using all means possible to ensure that every child, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, language proficiency, or disability, learns and succeeds.
- Urging high expectations for all students while recognizing that MCPS has an obligation to sustain a system that supports student learning at high levels.
- Embracing a differentiated approach that has shown success in helping the neediest of children to support their achievement.

Our community at Rolling Terrace would like to commend MCPS for creating these core values as a roadmap for the future of our students. Given the economic struggles we face, we have specific areas we'd like to share as essentially connected to this roadmap; areas that we feel the Board of Education should consider as they allocate funds to support student achievement.

Our main goal today is to stress the importance of early intervention on student achievement. Any long term goals MCPS has to attain success for all students must begin with a strong educational base. We strongly advocate for MCPS to focus funding towards Head Start and Pre-Kindergarten programs; this focus should not only include continued support of current programs, but also include expansion of Head Start and Pre-K programs to a wider group of students.

Currently MCPS has certain income requirements for families enrolling children into early intervention programs. While we realize how important it is to catch the very neediest of children, we also know that spaces are limited and also do not catch those that may fall just outside the income requirements. Being a Title One school, we have first hand experience with these issues. Many of our families who do not make it into these early programs cannot afford quality childcare or preschool options.

An article from the American School Board Journal states that “many students, particularly low-income and minority children, arrive in kindergarten and first-grade classrooms already far behind their peers; while this problem is particularly serious for disadvantaged youngsters, plenty of middle-class children—especially boys—also come to school with poor language, literacy, and social-emotional skills.” Latino students in particular, especially if English is not a first language at home, are among the highest at risk group for academic failure. The research in this area is very clear: high-quality prekindergarten (pre-k) programs that start building children’s academic and social skills can help narrow gaps and build a foundation for success in early elementary school.

As we know, without a foundation of success in early elementary school, building towards the 7 keys of college readiness advocated by MCPS would not be possible. From 2006 to 2009, Montgomery County high schools have seen graduation rates decline, regardless of student race. Among the highest declines were a 6% drop in African American students, and a 4% drop in Latino students. When searching for the answer to achievement gaps, lowered graduation rates, and a large group of children missing the 7 keys, our Rolling Terrace community urges the

Board of Education to dig down to the core of the issue; reach down through the numbers and statistics to where the foundation of education begins.

Head Start and Pre-K programs serve an important purpose, but in order to build towards student achievement, we strongly urge you to view long term academic success as a “bottom up” process. This is essential in communities like our own, where language and economic barriers can prevent students from receiving the early interventions they need. We strongly feel that if MCPS focuses funding in these areas, long-term effects will be clearly evident. Research overwhelmingly shows that math and reading levels are higher in children who are exposed to early education. Head Start and Pre-k expansion has tremendous promise to improve student achievement and help narrow achievement gaps—but only if MCPS prioritizes these needs into budget allocations. We will, as a community, continue to advocate for the expansion of Head Start/Pre-K to more students.

Our Rolling Terrace Community would like to thank the Board of Education for the time and consideration.

References:

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Mead, S. (2008). A Foundation for Success. *American School Board Journal*, 195(11), 25-29