

**Testimony of Francisco Cartagena
Before the Montgomery County Board of Education
Public Hearing on the Strategic Plan October 12, 2006**

Good Evening,

My name is Francisco Cartagena, and I am a sophomore at Gaithersburg High School. I am from El Salvador. I came to the United States about three years ago and entered the ESOL program. I am in the class of 2009. In order to graduate, I will have to pass the HSAs. This is a big concern for me.

Last year, only 62.7% of Latino students at MCPS passed the Algebra HSA and only 50.1% passed English 2. However, 90.9% of Caucasian students passed the Algebra test, and 83.7% passed English 2.

Last year I went to HSA prep to be ready for the Algebra HSA. Anyone taking Algebra could come to the prep class, but there were only 4 Latinos there. Unlike me, most Latino students weren't aware of how important the HSAs were or that they could go to a prep class. My hard work helped me pass the test, but how will other Latino students improve their scores if they are not preparing? It is urgent that the school develop a plan to make students and parents aware of how important these tests are.

One thing the school can do is provide an HSA prep program for ESOL students. This program needs to have teachers available who can help students overcome their language barriers, such as teachers who speak Spanish. When I went to the HSA prep last year, there were no Spanish-speaking teachers. The teacher could not stop to explain vocabulary that I did not know and I struggled to keep up with the class. I would have felt more comfortable asking for help in an ESOL class. If I felt this way as an advanced ESOL student, how could a new ESOL student keep up?

The school also needs to meet with ESOL parents so that they are aware of the tests and how their children can prepare.

If the school does not address this immediately, many Latino students will not graduate in 2009.

Thank you.