

Testimony of Preston Rico
Before the Montgomery County Board of Education
Public Hearing on the Strategic Plan October 12, 2006

President of the School Board, Superintendent Jerry Weast, Members of the Board, and the MCPS community.

Good Evening! A few years ago, I had the privilege to address you on issues pertaining to the Asian community. I thank you for having this forum again and reaching out to the communities at large. My name is Preston Rico, president of AAPAC. AAPAC stands for Asian American Parents Advocacy Council. Our group mission is to support and speak on behalf of Asian American children and youth. Because of this position as President, I have had the pleasure to be interviewed by a group of students at Roberto Clemente Middle School in Germantown. I have been in interview panels, and a go between if there are volunteers required to fill MCPS parent involvement in initiatives such as the Middle School Reform, and the revamping of the Math curriculum in Middle School.

Budgets are never fun, but it is serious work. Two years ago, we asked for more funding in ESOL programs. Two years ago we asked for more Asian staffing in key decision making positions, Two years ago, we asked for more help in seeking out the under representation of Asian children in special education. This year I would like to add Technology in Special Education into the mix and I will explain that further a little later.

The good news is MCPS continues to increase funding for ESOL. Studies show that Asian American children work hard to leave ESOL programs within an average of two years. It is well worth the investment. We thank MCPS and the parents of these children for making a serious effort to mainstream this group of children.

Asian staffing is a must. Asian American children in some parts of the county now range in the 30 to 40 percent of the total student population. We don't mean quotas. We want competent, well-trained teachers, and administrators. We as a community don't want MCPS to fill in a number, we want qualified candidates to have earned that number.

Two years ago, I stood here and brought the attention of the under representation of Asian children in Special Education programs. Reports show that Asian students with needs are being under screened or overlooked. This continues to be a problem. In one of the MCCPTA meetings I attended, I asked why that is to one of the guest speakers that night. The speaker said that the MCPS is concentrating more on why African American, and Hispanic American children is being overrepresented. It was a very candid answer, and one, which I welcome. As a culture, Asian parents are known not to speak about an imperfect child—a taboo so to speak. Nobody wants that label. On the other hand, teachers and administrators often overlook and under screen because Asian children who have issues often don't act out or the child tries to keep it quiet. The perception or stereotype is that Asian children are well behaving, and are smart. As a parent, I want to let all Asian parents know MCPS cannot do it alone. You have to be involved; MCPS needs your input; you know your child more than MCPS knows your child. So help MCPS. MCPS Special Education Dept. has some of the most dedicated teachers and specialists I have ever met. Take my word for it, the experiences I have with them did not disappoint.

Lastly, I would like to add Technology in Special Education in this years' discussion. The investment of technology in special education is the key to narrowing the gap of children that are

in those classes and the goal to mainstream those children into regular classes. The budget needs to include not only the technology, but the training of teachers to use that technology. What I have found out is sometimes that the software is available in certain schools but the training to use that technology is not available. Sometimes the teachers are trained on how to use the program but there's not enough money for them to purchase these expensive software. Sometimes in some schools there are neither trained teachers nor education software to help Special Education children. There are numerous technological advances that can help our children get mainstreamed into regular classes. A lot of the budget monies went into training teachers on how to handle children with special needs since MCPS have eliminated the LADD programs, but MCPS failed to provide Special Education software. Technology and the training of teachers to use this technology are key to the success of the children with Special Needs.

Thank you, there's much work to do and thanks for listening.