

**Testimony of Joan Karasik on Behalf of the Transition Work Group
Before the Montgomery County Board of Education
Public Hearing on the Strategic Plan October 12, 2006**

I am Joan Karasik, speaking on behalf of the Transition Work Group, made up of parents, agency representatives and service providers who are concerned about the often difficult transition of students with disabilities from the assurance of school services to the uncertainties of the adult world.

For graduates who are not college bound, preparation for the world of work is critical and most important is work experience. Thus, we urge real increase in the number of special education paraeducators in our high schools. When well trained, these people can act as job coaches, helping the students learn specific skills and, more important, learn how to be a productive and desirable part of a work staff, and, also important, fading their supports as the students become able to work independently on the job, so that the para can move on to work with other students..

We also urge serious consideration for expansion of the hours-based staffing model which is being tried in a few schools. - For more realistic and effective staffing of special education services.

We also urge more funds in school budgets to expand after-school activities, in keeping with the revised BOE policy. After-school activities can provide enriching and supportive experiences, may motivate students toward greater effort in the classroom, can open doors to lifelong learning, pastimes, hobbies and even careers.

We take part of our three minutes to mention some not strictly budget items which make a great difference in the preparation of young people for life. One is more emphasis on self-advocacy skills. The ability to speak out for oneself is often mentioned as critical by graduates with disabilities, those in college and those trying for their first job.

We know that by 2010 or so, all students are expected to hit 100% in every subject. But give a break to those who learn more slowly or differently. Encourage our stressed-out teachers to leaven the rigorous lump of learning with classroom time that treads interesting byways, provides hands-on experiences, opportunities to explore individual interests -and in both core and elective subjects. Help them all -college-bound and otherwise -leave our schools equipped and eager to continue learning throughout their lives