

Testimony Presented to Montgomery County Board of Education Public Hearing on the Strategic Plan October 12, 2006

by Candace Kattar, Executive Director Identity, Inc.

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My name is Candace Kattar. I am the Executive Director of Identity, a nonprofit organization working with Latino youth and their families in Montgomery County. During the 2005 -2006 school year, Identity expects to serve approximately 500 Latino youth and their families with our after-school programming, parent sessions and mental health and case management efforts.

Identity was one of several organizations that participated in the original Latino Education Coalition's work in 2005 -2006. Our work culminated with a set of Recommendations, supported by the Latino community and community advocates, which were presented to you this spring before an audience of over 200 Latino youth, parents and supporters. The recommendations asked for MCPS to focus on three important areas:

1. Our METS students -those students entering our school system with interrupted or limited formal education
2. Outreach to Latino parents -in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner.
3. Increasing Latino and Spanish-speaking staff, particularly in those schools serving large numbers of Latino families

Dr. Frieda Lacey very quickly pulled together a large group of MCPS staff. and community members to work on the Coalition's recommendations. That work continues as we speak.

I am testifying today specifically about our METS students, to help insure that those young people do not disappear from your radar screen as we move ahead with the strategic planning process.

As Doctor Weast has said, MCPS' Strategic Plan is a "living document." It is intended as a guide to ensure success for every Montgomery County public school student in an environment of rapidly changing demographics and increasingly rigorous assessments. The changing demographics of MCPS include growing numbers of adolescent METS students, new arrivals we capture in the system upon entry and others already in our system who slipped through and are floundering without appropriate support.

Our METS students, already disadvantaged by a lack of formal education or interrupted education present a very special challenge to our school system. Adolescent METS students who enter school for the first time at the high school level, in all likelihood will not receive a high school diploma. These students are often much older than their counterparts. Time is working against them. Their low levels of literacy would require schooling far beyond the age of 21 in order for them to satisfy our current graduation requirements.

In secure and stable societies, children do not fail to attend school. Children fail to attend school when it is too dangerous to do so or the poverty and lack of attention that surrounds them does not support academic achievement. As a result, many of these children also come to us having survived severe physical and emotional trauma and with tremendous needs for social and emotional support.

School systems may be tempted to turn their backs on these students. They make Adequate

Yearly Progress more difficult to obtain. They are disproportionately reflected in drop out numbers. They do not raise overall school SAT scores. The social and academic supports they require are costly. The frustration felt by these children can often be reflected in "acting out" and other inappropriate behavior, adding to the irritation of the school systems.

But MCPS has chosen not to turn its back on these students. Throughout the summer and into the fall, the Latino Education Coalition has been busy. Our work has included:

- studying what other school districts may be doing for similar populations;
- examining the research on best instructional practices;
- listening to METS students, METS teachers and parents of METS students;
- looking into vocational and first language literary issues;
- planning for program components and new curricula; and
- exploring broader assessment tools and ways to capture all of these students as soon as they enter the school system.

As the body charged with leadership and oversight of our school system, I ask you to ensure that the recommendations of the Latino Education Coalition be supported and that these students not be overlooked in our strategic plans for the coming years. I believe the numbers are far greater than those we are now capturing. And therefore the potential for positive impact on our overall student body is also great.

In closing, I want to acknowledge the leadership of Dr. Frieda Lacey in moving this initiative forward and keeping us on track, and the hard work and commitment of all of the individuals from within and outside MCPS involved in this effort.

Thank you.