

Testimony for the Board of Education Budget Forum

October 12, 2006

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Dr. Weast, Members of the Board, good evening. Thank you for this chance to provide community input on the budget. Thank you also for your ongoing initiatives to expand accelerated and enriched instruction, such as the new upcounty high school magnet programs at Poolesville.

How much would you pay me if I said I could double the number of students from high-need schools entering programs for the highly gifted? What if I could double the number in one year?

The good news is that you don't have to pay me anything because MCPS has already developed a program that did this, the Title I Gifted Initiative. According to MCPS's own performance measure, the half-time Gifted and Talented teaching position has succeeded beyond all expectations.

The bad news is, this program is only in 19 elementary schools and there are no plans to expand it. I urge you to expand the Title I Gifted and Talented Initiative and PADI program now - starting with 25 high-need schools next fall.

Although I am speaking as an individual, the recommendations of the Deputy Superintendent's Advisory Committee on Gifted Education include expanding the Title I Gifted Initiative.

These programs belong in all elementary schools. I am a member of an e-mail group for PTA GT liaisons; these are PTA members who are active in their local PTAs on GT issues. Last year I was stunned when one of our members posted that her school didn't have any of the problems the rest of us were complaining about: at her school students received accelerated and enriched instruction and everything was explained clearly and openly to the parents. I had never heard anyone say anything like this before.

It turned out that this parent was from one of the schools that has the Title I Gifted Initiative. The Title I Gifted Initiative provides a half-time Gifted and Talented Teacher to train school staff, to reach out to parents, and to serve students. At the same time, **PADI**, the Program of Assessment and Diagnostic Instruction, nurtures talent and teaches cognitive skills with activities like developing questions to guess a hidden object. Schools that have these programs together do a better job at identifying gifted African American and Hispanic students than comparable schools.

Another parent and I decided to visit one of the Title I schools and see this program for ourselves. We watched a group of fifth graders discuss Emily Dickinson and analyze the influence of her life on two of her poems. A class of third graders participated in a Junior Great Books discussion. We heard about Hands on Science classes offered during lunch.

We asked the GT teacher if she thought her position helped to increase the number of minority students in programs like the Centers for the Highly Gifted. She replied emphatically yes. This past year her outreach had been directly responsible for getting two students to apply who were accepted into programs for the highly gifted. She changed their lives.

There are many schools in Montgomery County that are high-need but not Title I. The half-time GT teachers have increased accelerated and enriched instruction at Title I schools; it's time to expand this program. Students should be able to get high-level instruction no matter where they live in the county. Fairfax County already has a half-time GT teacher in every elementary school. Our school system has an urgent need to do a better job for highly able African American and

Hispanic students, for highly able students from low-income families, and for highly able students who are English language learners. PAD1 and the Title I Gifted Initiative are programs that have been shown to work. They should be expanded now.

Thank you again for the chance to speak to you about next year's budget.

Diane McHale