

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

Good evening. My name is Lisa Carvallo. Many of you know me from my work at Montgomery College, but I am here tonight as a taxpayer and private citizen to express my concern for the Latino children in our community. Our society is losing Latino children at every juncture of the education continuum, but nowhere is this as pronounced as at the high school level, where many of our newcomer older Latino students are struggling to catch up after having had interrupted, limited or no formal education. These high school students are struggling to learn basic sentence structure, basic reading and basic writing skills that normally would have been mastered in elementary school. At the same time, they are expected to learn core content.

We are losing these students. They are becoming frustrated because they see no hope for their academic futures. Their plight is further complicated by the fact that their parents are struggling with their own issues and are unable to advocate for their children. We have already begun to see how students who didn't make it through the system have fared. The lure of gangs and the misguided notion that an easy resolution is to start a family of their own constantly draws many of these kids out of school and down the wrong path.

The challenges we have are great. Although the demographics in our country have shifted, our education systems have not. High schools are divided into departments with teachers who specialize in the various disciplines. Often, the departments are and the teachers are isolated from each other. Students are generally grouped by age and everyone is expected to take similar courses and be able to comprehend all at the same speed. Teachers are expected to teach for most of the day with one period for planning. This structure is not working for some students, and particularly, for students who may not have had the educational background necessary to be successful in our schools. We need to start doing something differently for these adolescents. This will require some creativity. It may also require a shift in the way we think about teaching and learning.

Some schools are already modeling the way with the establishment of smaller learning communities that allow teachers from different disciplines common planning periods to collaborate towards a shared curriculum. I would support this model for high school students with interrupted, limited or no formal education. Professional development specifically geared towards helping teachers to integrate reading and writing strategies into lesson plans they have already perfected will also help to meet the needs of this special population.

I am pleased that the administration has convened a committee to advocate for these students. The SWIFE Committee has conducted extensive research on the topic and has made several other recommendations to the Board. We have an opportunity to make a difference for these kids and for our community. I am asking you to help make it happen by fully funding the recommendations I discussed tonight. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted by
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