



Board of Education Testimony  
October 11, 2007

Nancy Leopold  
Executive Director

Good evening. My name is Nancy Leopold. I am the Executive Director of CollegeTracks, an independent non-profit organization founded because every student who graduates from Montgomery County Public Schools deserves the opportunity for higher education, regardless of his or her family's income, race, or college-going history.

Board of Directors

Marcy Frosh

CollegeTracks levels the playing field for students most at risk of not attending college – first-generation college bound; low-income; minority; and immigrant youth. We give these students and families intensive, ongoing support to navigate the college admission process and to secure enough financial aid to attend.

Cathie Goltz

Joyce Gwadz

Ned Johnson

In the six years we have been collaborating with MCPS, CollegeTracks has worked with more than 500 high school seniors at Wheaton and B-CC High Schools. Over 98% of those students have gone to college or technical school following graduation.

Nancy Leopold

Jane Macht

Elizabeth McLeod

Tonight I want to call your attention to the importance of academic support to student success in rigorous courses and to their ability to go to college

Jeff Seltzer

Doug Schiffman

MCPS will not be able to close the achievement gaps between rich and poor kids of all colors and origins until we close the gaps in academic support.

Marsha Shaines

Jeff Wagner

Increasing academic achievement for all requires more than just raising expectations and making sure that all students have the opportunity to take rigorous courses. Many of the same students who were previously unable to register for rigorous courses are now struggling or failing in those courses because they can't get the tutoring available to their more affluent peers.

Nancy Zeller

Time and again, we've seen CollegeTracks kids with decent grades in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade earning lousy marks as they struggled in the more rigorous classes they were pushed to take as juniors and seniors.

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Don't believe the rhetoric from the College Board and others that a B or C in a rigorous course is better than an A or B in an on level course. It ain't so.

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Lower cumulative Grade Point Averages hurt students' chances to get into selective colleges and sometimes make them unable to qualify for the financial aid they need to attend.

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The Maryland Guaranteed Access Grant, for example, gives up to \$14,800 to our poorest high school seniors ONLY IF they have an unweighted GPA of 2.5 or higher. That's unweighted -- a "C" grade, for the purposes of this and other scholarships, counts as 2 points in the GPA, regardless of whether it was in the AP or on-level version of the course.

Losing out on merit scholarships and on the Guaranteed Access grant sometimes limits students' options to Montgomery College, despite their being prepared for four-year colleges.

(Though Montgomery College is the right choice for some, its graduation rates are abysmal, and approximately 30 % of MCPS graduates who start at Montgomery College eventually receive baccalaureate degrees compared to over 80% of those who start at a 4-year public university in Maryland.)

I am NOT suggesting that we stop encouraging students to take the most rigorous courses they can handle. I am requesting that we commit serious resources to make sure that ALL students have access to the academic support they need to succeed in those courses.

Rigorous courses are the means, not the end. The ends are better educations and futures for all our students. In a world turned flat, higher education is essential to a good job and financial security. MCPS succeeds when its graduates get admitted to and succeed in college. To measure that success accurately, you must hold MCPS accountable for how many of its graduates go to college and what types of colleges they attend, not just for getting more students enrolled in rigorous courses.



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