

Dr. Weast and Members of the Board,

Good evening. My name is Ben Elkind and I am the President of MCR-SGA, the Montgomery County Regional Student Government Association, which was formerly known as MCR. The issue that I have come to testify in favor of is increased student participation in MCPS policymaking processes.

Students are increasingly well-accounted for when it comes to the decisions made by the Board of Education. From Public Testimony to the Student Member of the Board position to the new Student Advisory Committee, there are an increasing number of quality opportunities for students to be involved. All of these steps to include students are great.

However, the county is not yet where it needs to be. There still are a number of committees and workgroups which we are unfairly not a part of. These include the Disproportionality Steering Committee and several Curriculum Advisory Committees. Various stakeholders, ranging from parents to professional educators to MCPS staff were included in these committees. Students were not and, as far as I know, limited effort was made to involve us. We are, of course, major stakeholders in Montgomery County Public Schools, if not the major stakeholder, and deserve to be represented at these levels.

From the perspective of MCPS, it is simply good policy to include student perspectives. I think that members of committees with students serving, such as the Committee on Family Life and Human Development, which I have the privilege of being a part of, would testify that our input is both helpful and necessary. The AP exam workgroup has also benefited from having student members, and has produced an excellent recommendation that will go a long way in reducing the testing burden. Plainly, it is unwise for middle-age and post-middle-age adults to try to consider how teenagers feel about issues, without having them there to speak for themselves. In the interest of being most effective, it makes sense that students be included in these groups.

Additionally, by reaching out and trying to make students a part of this government, you all can send a very important message to students. There is a crucial misconception about this county's and, for that matter, this country's youth that we do not care much about political processes. The perceived lack of interest does not reflect that students do not want to shape the world that we live in. Youth are not getting involved in large part because many of us feel that we are not wanted in the process. By including more students in government through these committees, you all work towards greater youth engagement in government.

In order to promote student inclusion and a more fair government, I recommend that workgroups should have at least one student position. I also suggest that MCPS staff use my organization as a resource to find qualified students.

I would also like to take this opportunity to extend an invitation to you all to attend a General Assembly of MCR-SGA. We have changed the structure of the General Assembly, so that a significant piece of the meeting is an open forum for students to talk about any issues that are important to them. It is a great opportunity to hear what is on students' minds.

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