

**Testimony
to the Board of Education
Montgomery County Public Schools**

**Thursday, October 11, 2007
Public Forum Wheaton High School**

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PALA Padres y Alumnos Latinos en Acción

-Latino Parents and Students in Action

Lack of knowledge of the School System and Lack of Appropriate Support:

1. **Lack of information and support with course registration:** The majority of Latino families come from an education system where schools have a standard set of courses per grade level. Families don't have to select courses every year. So, each student knows exactly what courses to take -they are the same for everyone. This is true even at the college level. In addition, there is not such a wide variety of courses within the same subject; for example, Math would be Math I, Math II, etc; they would not be familiar with Algebra, geometry, pre-calculus, and consumer math; much less would they know what to do when given a choice of on-level, AP, IB, or Honors classes. Therefore, many students choose the first course that shows the grade level that they will be attending, and that is frequently the on-level courses, or they trust their counselor's or teachers' selection without question. **The school system needs to educate these families about their options and the meaning of taking the different courses.**

Let me share an experience that I had during Back to School Night in September. I was advising this 9th grader, born in the U.S., and her mother about the **benefits of AP classes.** **The girl told me smiling that she was taking an AP course.** I asked her what class it was. She did not remember, then, she showed me her schedule. She happened to be enrolled in "SOFT APP," meaning, "Software Applications."

2. **Lack of Guidance:** Many Latino students and their families are not aware of the benefits of college preparatory courses, the college admissions process, financial aid, and much less goal-setting and career development. There are many Latino students who are U.S. citizens or legal residents who do not apply for Financial Aid. They think they will incur debt; instead, they end up running up their credit cards, and eventually leave college because they can not afford it. Likewise, there are many students who are undocumented, and do not realize that they can still attend college. They do not know that Montgomery College has an open admissions policy, has so many great programs to choose from, and is a very welcoming institution for everyone. I know this because I am a Community College Counselor. **Students should leave MCPS knowing the basics of the college and financial aid process.**
3. **Parent/School Disconnect:** Many Parents are disconnected from their children's schools; they are not informed about school activities on a regular basis; they do not receive information in their language; when there are meetings, they are only in English and generally do not address their particular needs. **Latino parents do want to be involved.** In schools, where parents feel welcome and their participation is valued, parents become engaged, support their schools, and their children do better.
4. **Lack of Knowledge of Technology:** EDLINE is a great tool for parents to monitor their children's progress; yet, as we discovered at our first Latino Parents meeting at Springbrook High School, there are many parents unfamiliar with the basics of computers. Some parents had difficulty even moving the cursor from box to box, much less did they have an e-mail account, yet a lot of the communications from the schools and PTSA's are by e-mail and internet.

My recommendations are:

1. Create **Bilingual Parent/Community Coordinators (PCC) Positions** that serve as Liaisons at the schools with significant immigrant populations.
2. Hire sensitive **Bilingual Counselors** who can provide appropriate guidance to students and parents.
3. Have **Guidance and Counseling** along with the other programs mentioned at the beginning, develop and implement an orientation program for immigrant students and parents, which will prepare them to be successful and contributing members of society.
4. **Develop milestones for Parent Community Coordinators and Counseling and Guidance service activities** that will determine how well students and families are doing in this area.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer my input. I believe these recommendations are in line with the vision, mission, and goals of the Montgomery County Public School System.