

**Testimony of Diana E. Conway**  
**On MCPS Chinese Program**  
**at Potomac ES, Hoover MS, Churchill HS**  
10-11-07

Good evening. I am Diana Conway. I'm here to talk about the imminent collapse of the Chinese partial immersion program at Potomac Elementary, and its follow-ons at Hoover MS and Churchill HS.

This program opened 12 years ago. It's so popular it used to generate weeks of testimony at your board meetings from parents desperate to get in, until you wisely opened a second venue at College Gardens ES. Parents have brought suit against MCPS repeatedly in their quest for admission. It generates constant publicity for MCPS across the country and around the world---the *first ever* U.S. public school Chinese immersion program. Built right here in Montgomery County.

Guess what---the emperor is buck naked.

**First issue: Transition from Potomac ES to Hoover MS.** The PES program offers math and science in Chinese. Students get the same math and science curriculum as everyone else, in Chinese. Their Chinese is not graded; only math and science are graded. Yet Hoover holds them to near-HS-accountability not only for listening & speaking, at which they are by then fairly adept, but also reading and writing in which they are nearly untrained. PES immersion staff has no curriculum time in which to plan or carry out instruction of reading and writing. Their duty is to math and science.  
**Goal:** This disconnect **MUST** be addressed for the program to be sustainable, or the benefit of the elementary years of exposure to the language is effectively wasted and lost. What is the purpose of partial immersion if the students' speaking and listening skills are not built onto? For the record, this pattern is repeated at College Gardens.

**Second issue: Curriculum.** MCPS has taught Chinese for over 20 years. Yet at a recent meeting we learned that MCPS has a new expert and is "working on" the curriculum for Levels 1, 2 and 3 (6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades for the PES graduates). What about Levels 4, 5, and 6? How can this process be so far behind?? The oldest PES grads are in 12<sup>th</sup> grade, in all those upper-level 4-5-6-AP classes.  
**Goal:** MCPS must accelerate resources to produce the curriculum, especially for those students who have invested the greatest number of years in the program. Many are on the brink of walking away, and many more already have. Who knew about this trend and to whom did they report this disturbing information? What steps were taken to address it? What was done to counsel students or discuss their decision? What outreach did MCPS engage in with departing students?

**Third issue: Staffing.** Churchill has a single Chinese teacher. Imagine having the same math teacher for four years. Leaving aside complaints on teaching style and standards,

this one-teacher situation is deeply unfair to both teacher and students. Students who are not a good fit with the teacher must lump it or abandon their decade-plus of Chinese studies. In addition every Chinese class at CHS combines multiple levels from 1 to 6 and AP, with 1 through 6 also splitting into regular and honors---yet not, since they're in the same classroom. How can a teacher instruct three levels in one classroom, from three different but non-existent curricula? This absurd challenge requires in part a different staffing plan.

**Goal:** Fortify recruitment, retention, mentoring, training, and cross-pollination among MCPS Chinese teachers, especially from the most successful. Where are the resources to deepen this staff? Who controls them or directs their expenditure? Who is in charge of recruiting, mentoring, retention, training of teachers?

**Fourth issue: Materials.** There are no textbooks in any Chinese class other than 6<sup>th</sup> grade within our cluster, and no audio-visual resources. All work is by hand or on hand-outs generated in monthly brainstorming sessions by teachers---not curriculum writing professionals. Is this MCPS?? This situation is absurd and does not exist in French and Spanish immersion. If MCPS is so wedded to its curriculum that it cannot adopt or adapt debugged, proven materials, then you must guarantee you will have them in time.

**Goal:** Make them or buy them---but have them ready.

**Wrap up:** Our community's goodwill and historic support for this uniquely-conceived program is melting into disappointment, bitterness, frustration and anger. The disbelief among parents that after twelve years MCPS is still not prepared for our students is extraordinary.

There is fault & blame scattered across the map: the absence of materials, curriculum, staff support, Levels-tests, funding for curriculum development, and vision/drive to keep ahead of the rolling student population, the combination classes in MS and HS, administration neglect or indifference, inadequate resources at central offices, school staffing decisions, recruitment/retention... These buzz words add up to no good for our kids.

I call on you to address the situation aggressively: marshal the resources and salvage the community's confidence in this program ...before the attrition begins trickling down to Hoover and Potomac.