

TESTIMONY
OF
EYAL BERGMAN
TO THE
MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION
COMMUNITY FORUM
AT
ALBERT EINSTEIN HIGH SCHOOL
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Members of the Board:

Good evening. My name is Eyal Bergman. I am a Program Manager with Identity.

I begin my remarks this evening by thanking the Einstein community. As a program facilitator here at Einstein during the last school year, I always sensed a genuine interest from parents, teachers, counselors and administrators to provide the most comprehensive, holistic approach to educating our students. Many caring MCPS staff has made our work possible here at Einstein.

Thank you to Ms. Magdalena DuBois, Einstein's Parent Community Coordinator. Thank you for passion and your dedication to our community. Thank you for bringing me to Einstein; it has truly been a privilege.

Last year, Identity provided Positive Youth Development programming to over 800 youth and families. Many of our current and former Identity participants are here this evening. They are also representing Albert Einstein High School, Wheaton High School, Montgomery Blair High School, Clarksburg High School, the Northwood High School Wellness Center and the Crossroads Youth Opportunities Center in Langley Park.

Like me, all of these MCPS students are immigrants or first generation Americans. In our home countries, there are no public school community forums. Open and respected public discourse is rare. They are here because they realize that they have greatest stake in the decisions that come

out of these forums. It is not easy for them to be here this evening, but they are here to be a part of the solution. Please, let's recognize them.

You will hear from some of these students this evening. Some of them will be speaking in their native language, which is why you have been provided English translations so you can follow along in case you're still sharpening up on your Spanish skills.

Tonight you will understand why I have chosen this line of work; these are inspiring young adults.

These students do not have stocks. Their parents do not have retirement funds invested in Wall Street. Yet, without even knowing it, these are the families most likely to be affected by the current downturn in our economy. Where will they find work when businesses stop hiring?

This year, Identity is operating with \$350 thousand less than last year due to a cut in our federal funding.

MCPS and its partners, Identity included, need to work harder at engaging Latino youth and their families in order to reverse the current disparities. As you well know, Latinos students have the lowest graduation rates, the highest dropout rates and the lowest attendance rates. Latinos simply do not feel connected to the schools.

Now, more than ever, these families need the support of MCPS to stay away from risky activities that are always more tempting when there is no work, no options, and nothing for them to do after school. MCPS must continue to fund Positive Youth Development programs for at-risk youth, especially during difficult economic times, in order to minimize the social pitfalls associated with poverty and the feelings of internalized oppression.

Thank you for your attention this evening. Thank you for your commitment to our youth.

Eyal Bergman