

COMMISSION ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH
Testimony Presented at the
Montgomery County Board of Education Community Forum
October 16, 2008

Hello. My name is Sammy Prywes. I am senior at Richard Montgomery High School and a youth representative on the Commission on Children and Youth.

The Commission on Children and Youth promotes the well being of Montgomery County's children, youth and families so that all young people may realize their full potential and become contributing, productive adults. Personally, I joined the Commission because I wanted to be involved in furthering discussion on issues that are particularly important to the youth in Montgomery County. I believe that youth must be able to express their thoughts and beliefs from their own perspective in order to make the greatest impact on the issues that matter to them. The Commission provides a unique ability for people my age to do just this. The Commission gave me the opportunity to try and help others in need that generally don't have a voice.

The Commission fully understands and appreciates the depressing economic situation in our County, State and country. We realize that you are getting ready to make some painful budget decisions. Thank you for considering my testimony in the decision-making process.

The Commission is focusing its 2008 – 2009 advocacy efforts on:

- 1) the overall **health and wellness** of our County's children and youth,
- 2) **youth engagement**, and
- 3) fostering **partnerships and collaborations** throughout Montgomery County

The Commission promotes a holistic focus on how an individual's home, school and community work together to support the mental, social, sexual, physical, and environmental health and wellness of Montgomery County's children and youth. Overall wellness encompasses mental health awareness, prevention and intervention, prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases and adolescent pregnancy, and nutritional health issues such as hunger and obesity. These issues are broad-based, complex and definitely cannot be tackled by one entity alone. Teamwork is the key for me, my friends, your children and grandchildren to be happy, healthy, and successful in school and in life.

In the spirit of collaboration, the Commission respectfully requests that the Board of Education encourage Montgomery County Public Schools to continue to support the work of the Department of Family and Community Partnerships (DFCP). DFPC exemplifies the connections that need to occur among families, community partners and schools in order for all students to be successful. Next, we encourage the Board and MCPS to expand its partnerships with County government and non-profit child and family serving agencies to address the challenges facing students, and strive to better

connect them with services and supports in the community. We believe that this type of collaboration is the only way that more families can be effectively served with less money. In light of the budget crisis, the Commission advocates that every child be considered “our child.”

The Commission on Children and Youth wishes to be a full-fledged partner with the Board of Education and Montgomery County Public Schools. Therefore, we respectfully request that the Board and Superintendent Weast reconsider appointing a member of the Commission to its Wellness Committee. The Commission is committed to the health and wellness of children and youth and individual Commissioners possess the knowledge and background to be valuable resources in your efforts to create a school culture that promotes and protects children’s health, well-being and ability to learn.

The Commission also recommends that the Board of Education consider incorporating additional youth-led, youth-run programming that offers enhanced peer-to-peer communication within schools. Honestly, kids are generally uncomfortable talking with adults and would much rather talk to each other. I knew this already but it became clear to the adult Commissioners at our 1st Annual *Youth Having a Voice Roundtable* in May 2008. At this event, youth representatives from a wide variety of children, youth and family serving agencies described the program with which they are involved, outlined the personal benefits of the program and provided perspective on the critical needs of youth in their communities. The insight and depth of the information provided by the youth was valuable to the Commission. But beyond that, it was apparent that we can learn a great deal from each other and that providing us with opportunities to share our experiences is incredibly worthwhile. The Commission feels that children and youth deserve the opportunity to work together across programs, share experiences and build greater peer-to-peer interactions.