

Transition Work Group

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Testimony – MCPS Community Forum

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The Transition Work Group is a small but earnest group of MCPS and county staff, service providers and parents. We work to improve the transition of young people with disabilities from school to work and independent living. We believe there are several actions MCPS can take to improve achievement for all students in 2009 and beyond – even in difficult economic times.

MCPS is working hard to bring students with disabilities back to their home schools, providing services in these home schools rather than busing students to centralized programs. *The FY 2009 budget includes additional staffing allocations at the elementary level to ensure that special education students be included in class size calculations for regular classroom teachers. It is absolutely essential that this priority be maintained not only at the elementary but also middle and high schools.*

At White Oak Middle School, there are 2-1/2 paraeducators to cover all general education classes. In several health, art and music classes at White Oak – which have been told to expand the rigor of their curriculum – there are classes with 35 to 40 students, including several with special needs, but no aide or other support. There are also students moving into the Home School Model in schools without adequate support. No one is successful in these situations, not the special or regular education student, not the family, not the staff.

- We recommend several alternatives for providing this support:
 - Ideally, **provide enough paraeducators** for all general education classes in which there are special education students.
 - **Investigate expanding the use of volunteers as classroom aides** at all grade levels, not just elementary school. These volunteers could be senior citizens – perhaps groups of active seniors who live in retirement communities near individual schools; many are retired teachers or would welcome an opportunity to be around young people and be of service. In elementary or middle schools, the volunteers could be high school students earning Student Service Learning hours.
 - For students with special needs, one new parent in our group suggested that schools make space available for **after-hours centers staffed by parents** where young people could receive help with tutoring, resumes, career planning and community job contacts.
- Another area that warrants investigation especially in difficult economic times is **transportation**.
 - We are moving more and more special education students back to their home schools but they are often still coming on special buses that provide door to door service that is costly and possibly unnecessary. Each student's situation must be evaluated individually but there very likely opportunities to have more special education students on regular buses. Any cost saving could be devoted to the

paraeducators mentioned earlier or to other strategic priorities that would meet the needs of all our students.

- On a related note, improving achievement for many of our special education students means increasing vocational and on-the-job training opportunities while they are in high school. Ultimately, some of the special education buses could be used either for some of the after school activities that are now in question or to transport students to job sites during the school day. Right now, there are six high schools with no access to public transportation during the school day and therefore no opportunity for our students with special needs to get to jobs or internships.

We in the Transition Work Group respect the difficult choices you must make in the face of diminishing resources. In closing, we believe there must be adequate support in the classroom - in any of the ways we suggested – if we are to have any hope of improving achievement for all students.