

Humza Kazmi
Testimony to Montgomery County Board of Education
18 September 2008

Understanding that Montgomery County Public Schools need to maximize the effectiveness of the quality of education provided, under the constraints of limited resources, I say that it is vital that MCPS focus on building basic reading, math, and science skills in elementary and middle schools. If a solid foundation is built during these early stages of learning and development, then students will be able to excel in these critical areas in high school and college.

According to the latest reports by the Program for International Student Assessment, fifteen-year-old American students fall significantly below the international average in science literacy and mathematical ability. These shortfalls range between eleven to twenty-five points below average on the thousand-point scale of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. The United States is falling behind its peers in these crucial sectors of academic development.

I propose that MCPS pull back from such indicators as “PSAT participation” and the number of students taking honors or AP classes as meaningful statistics. The relevant factor isn't PSAT participation, but rather PSAT performance. Similarly, one honors or AP course isn't going to be terribly significant – it is only when several are taken that a significant effect on a child's education becomes apparent. Obviously, those who want to take honors or AP classes should not be discouraged – rather the opposite! - but using this as an indicator of satisfactory academic performance is not a viable strategy, and should not be used as a demographic check.

While MCPS may have to deal with limited resources, it is vital to ensure that Maryland's children are given a solid foundation in the basic fundamentals. In 2007, less than 40% of 5th graders were considered at or above proficiency in mathematics! What is worse, this result was deemed satisfactory, and marked as the desired target of 34% having been met. These findings are documented in the Annual Call to Action Report issued by Montgomery County Public Schools, ladies and gentlemen. The children of Maryland deserve far better.

Montgomery County's school system has been one of the major factors in drawing immigration and prosperity to this county. If we authorize cutbacks in school funding, at a time when American students are falling behind their peers from other nations, then we risk one of the fundamentals of our county's and our nation's success. It is vital that Montgomery County continue to improve its school system, and avoid any decrease in funding.