

Montgomery County Public School Board
Board of Education

Community Forum – September 18, 2008

Good evening. My name is James Modrick, and I am the parent of two children attending Wheaton Woods Elementary School. I am here before you as an individual among many other individuals, with many other interests and expectations. Yet you have a budget which, at some point, is limited. Those limitations might appear to create “either this or that” scenarios. There is also the opportunity to use your strategic plan to create “both this and that” opportunities, which is what I urge you to do.

However, even with a good plan, evidence of “either this or that” thinking is raising questions. I want to see if you can answer the questions of a seven-year-old. A seven-year-old who is walking the halls with her friend, not of their home school of Wheaton Woods, but a neighboring school less than five miles from theirs. A school that even on the last day of classes, still has hallways displaying an abundance of art work created by students – not just in art or music class – but apparent in any hallway, in any grade, and depicting math and reading assignments as well as other subjects. The question overheard by a father’s ear is, “Why don’t we have this in our school?”

Why does it appear that the availability of an arts-rich learning environment – not just art and music classes, but arts infused instruction and community arts partnerships – seems to be dependent on the luck of address and zip code? But what zip codes, and how is the integration of the arts supported, and is arts integration helping to close the achievement gap? A group of individuals who recognized the essential importance of the capacity of the imagination in education want to document where this is taking place, and how we can create a “both this and that” solution through the arts in education.

While thinking about that, consider this. A recent poll conducted by Lake Research Associates noted that 9 of 10 people surveyed said that developing the imagination is important to innovation and essential to success in the 21st-century workforce. Respondents added that an education in and through the arts is essential to developing the imagination.

Montgomery County parents expect as much from their schools, and expect it throughout the “Pursuit of Excellence” of the strategic plan. The Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County, with its member cultural organizations and education volunteers, stands ready to make arts integration the “both/and” solution to high quality teaching and learning.

Developing the capacities of the imagination is more than an extra-curricular novelty for students and schools already achieving. It is an essential capacity for success – both in the work force of tomorrow and our classrooms today – for all of our students, for their teachers, for school principals, and – yes – even school board members.

Thank you.