



COMMISSION ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The Commission on Children and Youth (Commission) acknowledges that the next few years will pose many new challenges to the Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) system. We support the Board of Education's (Board) commitment to promoting academic excellence while also addressing gaps in student achievement.

You asked for responses to the question, "During difficult economic times, what priorities should we focus on to improve achievement for all students?" The Commission believes that **EVERY** child that lives in this County deserves an opportunity to succeed in school so that they can continue on in their lives as productive, contributing citizens.

The Commission encourages the Board to remember that student achievement is affected by more than what goes in the classroom. It is well documented that a number of factors, which are beyond the control of the school system, including poverty, family instability, low educational attainment by parents, low expectations at home and lack of positive family and community support can derail student success. Therefore, it is critical to protect those initiatives where schools can have an impact including academic programming that support success, as well as behavioral supports such as small class sizes in high-need schools, counselors and out-of-school time programs. Sustaining effective levels of programming can positively impact social engagement, maturation and development, all of which are needed for students to succeed in school.

Next, we ask that you evaluate the distribution of funding to offer equitable academic and behavioral supports, acknowledging that there are multiple ways for children to learn and there is value in supporting college-bound students and those at-risk students that face obstacles that threaten their ability to succeed, such as learning disabilities and language barriers. As our County moves from acknowledging that demographics are changing to living in a more diverse community, MCPS must continually prepare to address the increasingly complex academic and social needs of students and families.

Finally, in these difficult times, the Commission recommends that the Board capitalize on existing resources to promote student achievement, including increasing collaborations and partnerships, seeking out and applying for full funding of programs for which our children and youth are qualified, leveraging the school system's extraordinary human capital, and increasing communications about programs and services among families, school staff, students and the broader community.

Jane de Winter

The Commission is well aware that the public school system cannot “do it all” and that student and family needs often exceed the capacity of MCPS. In response, we recommend that the Board look for every opportunity to partner with County departments, such as the Department of Recreation and Department of Health and Human Services, non-profits, such as Identity and Project Change, and foundations, such as the Montgomery County Community Foundation, to better meet the needs of **ALL** students in order to improve their success in school. The Commission also encourages the Board to leverage all available resources at the local, State and Federal levels to enhance instruction and increase opportunities that promote student success.

Many children and their families have untapped potential to become strong self advocates and access the supports they need to succeed in school. Administrators, teachers, aides and all other school personnel have the potential to be mentors and guides for our students while school counselors are in high demand but low supply. The Commission learned directly from teens at its last *Youth Having a Voice Roundtable* that youth in our County require, and seem to crave, consistent guidance from accessible, caring adults, especially when they are not - for many different reasons - receiving it from parents and extended family. The Commission looks to you to creatively mobilize the entire school community so all students receive the academic and behavioral supports required for school success.

This year the Commission is focused on making sure that all children and youth aware of and have access to resources they need to succeed in school and in life. We are proud that despite the economic downturn, MCPS offers it students a multitude of academic and social supports. In fact, many members were inspired to join the Commission because they once benefited from services offered by MCPS or its partners and now wish to give back to the community that once provided for them. For example, when asked why she joined the Commission, one of our youth representatives responded, “I love ‘MoCo’ and Montgomery County Public Schools.” This young lady had participated in the *Kids After Hours* program which, she fondly recounted, provided her with her first winter coat. MCPS also provided her with free and reduced priced meals, which helped relieve some financial stress in her family. Unfortunately, many children and their families do not know about school-based or community programs such as *Kids After Hours* that are available. We look to the Board to enact non-traditional and innovative ways to communicate and circulate information about effective academic, social and behavioral programming that exists in our County.

Thank you for your time and attention. Please do not hesitate to contact the Commission if we can be of any assistance.

****Reminder: The Commission has invited members of the Board to attend its 3rd *Youth Having a Voice Roundtable* on Wednesday, November 4. Please contact our staff liaison, Mary Gies, for further details.****