

MCPS forum, October 15, 2009

I am Joan Karasik, speaking as a concerned mother and as a concerned citizen

As the concerned mother of a son who has significant developmental disabilities, I thoroughly endorse Liz Roth's statement on behalf of the Arc and the Autism Society, urging funding for hours-based staffing, counting special ed students in general ed classrooms, development of staff to work productively with our increasingly diverse student body, maintaining numbers of transition support teachers, and forging ahead on Universal Design for Learning .

As a concerned citizen, I speak of our many students, with or without disabilities, who are not going on to Harvard. I was delighted that the County Council requested the OLO to prepare a report on our career and life-readiness programs. Apparently they are concerned that too many of our young people are in danger of becoming responsibilities rather than contributors to our community. I was also delighted that, on Tuesday, the Board started a serious discussion of many questions raised by the OLO study.

Almost a quarter of our Hispanic students and more than 15% of our African American students do not graduate. Why? Some of them need jobs but apparently many find school discouraging and irrelevant to their lives.

And actual drop-outs are only part of the problem. How about those who continue to attend school but, as one might say, drop out in the classroom, finding no incentive for purposeful learning.

How well are we -

(a) preventing drop-outs by engaging these at-risk students in the opportunities and challenges that our schools can provide, and

(b) whether drop-outs or not, how well are we preparing these students for the world of work and productive life in our community?

I trust that you will continue to work with staff and Council on these critical issues.

Thank you,

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