

Community Forum
Montgomery County Public Schools
Board of Education
October 15, 2009

Good evening. My name is **Sue Katz Miller**. I am a parent of a 10th and a 7th grader, a former teacher, a schools columnist, and a former PTA President.

I came before you a year ago to express concern about the crisis in writing instruction. I urge you to reread that testimony. While I appreciate that MCPS officials took time to listen to my suggestions and to explain how they are trying to improve writing instruction, many parents and teachers continue to see this as the greatest academic weakness in our system. Many of us, both parents and teachers, were dismayed that the Seven Keys to College Readiness did not mention writing—a huge missed opportunity. Remedial writing classes are the most common form of remediation faced by college freshmen. I wrote to you last spring to ask for the reasoning behind this omission in the Seven Keys, and received no response from the Board or MCPS.

I am told that more writing instruction will result naturally as we push more students to take AP tests. I suggested to an MCPS AP administrator that focusing on writing might help improve AP test scores. I was shocked when the administrator responded that good writing is not necessary to score well on an AP test—that it's more a matter of memorizing content.

The writing crisis is just one symptom of everything that has been pushed aside in the relentless pursuit of raising reading and math scores under NCLB. Social studies, science, arts, experiential learning on field trips, crucial kindergarten playtime, all have suffered. And creativity in the classroom, allowing teachers to communicate their passions and ignite passion in students, has suffered greatly.

We understand that NCLB was necessary to bring accountability to teaching the basics of math and reading to all children. But the pendulum has swung way, way too far. This is supposed to be a world class school system: we have enormous resources and the best possible staff. If we cannot push back, if we allow NCLB to so deform our curriculum that students no longer have time to write plays or research papers, to learn geography or study pond water, to learn grammar or vocabulary or spelling, to sing rounds or plant gardens or work in clay, then we cannot be surprised when we see kids dropping out of high school, when we see families opting out of the school system, and when we see wonderful teachers leaving the profession.

I was recently asked by a relatively savvy parent if there is some way we could get a parent representative onto the school board. I was taken aback. I explained that I'm pretty sure that every BOE member is or has been an MCPS parent. But is the Board representing the parent perspective? The Baldrige Prize committee pointed to lack of stakeholder input as a weakness in MCPS. The only annual MCPS parent survey does not even address curriculum. If it did, you would hear a mandate from parent stakeholders calling for more writing, social studies, science, arts and experiential learning. Thank you.