

October 15, 2009 Board of Education Testimony by Cindy Montgomery

I am Cindy Montgomery, Wootton class of 1981, Penn State Materials Science and Engineering Class of 1985, currently at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and my husband is a researcher at NIST. I am here to tell you about the importance of funding the Montgomery Blair Magnet. My daughter, Katelin, started 9th grade this year at the Magnet, having not been in the middle school magnet nor the elementary school magnet.

Her initial comments as a student at Blair have been: "I am normal here. I am finally with my intellectual peers. They understand my jokes here. I love my life. I had the most fun at the PEP rally—I love Blair more than anyone."

She wants to do research this summer with the world expert on Celiac Disease. However, first she needs as much high school science under her belt as possible, and evidently, only Blair can provide it. Chemistry is her passion. Her dad, mom and after school caretaker (spelled grandpa from MIT) are all chemists. She was ready for honors Chemistry in eighth grade. I tried satisfying her appetite for science at Wootton and Churchill, first for 8th grade and then for 9th grade. Here is what happened.

The Wootton counselor sent me a response email to my request (that she meant to send to the science resource teacher.) It said, quote, "Chris, this one is all yours..... This is a ;7th grader, I am not sure what mom is thinking, Churchill suggested she just skip 8th grade....Can kids get credit for geometry the way she is suggesting? Interesting, she could go straight to college and skip us all together. L"

The Churchill counselor told Katelin who was in 7th grade, and my 5th grade son, "The biggest problem we have here at Churchill is student mental breakdowns and it is all because of pushy parents like your mother."

In choosing classes last Spring for 9th grade at either Wootton and Churchill, Katelin chose Chemistry and Biology- perfect preparation for her research. The answer from both schools was "no, it is not allowed." I asked the Wootton science resource teacher herself to tell Katelin she couldn't take Biology and Chemistry in 9th grade. Katelin was told she couldn't handle it. Crying, she asked me, "Don't they know who I am?"

I wanted to believe that Wootton, or her home school, Churchill, were best for her and she could be at the top of the class at either one. I, personally, went to Cold Spring the first year it opened—with its global thinking, open classrooms, and love of learning. Those concepts have been replaced by standardized curriculum!

Make sure you ask the country's best colleges before you close the Blair magnet—Blair students enhance the reputation of Montgomery County. If Katelin hadn't gone to Blair, she would have accepted an offer to attend Holton Arms on scholarship. For my money, Blair magnet is the best in the country. Please don't ignore the existence of children with special needs because if we ignore them, they *will* go away.