

**The Autism Society Montgomery County and
The Arc of Montgomery County Education Committee
Community Forum Testimony, October 15, 2009**

Good Evening: We are presenting a joint address to you tonight in order to save time for everyone. As the budgets in the County, State and Federal Government are impacting all of the services. The school system needs to be flexible and prudent in using the funds allotted. This means there will be many changes in all areas for all students. It is going to be hard to hold services in place and to provide for additional enrollees. There are going to be many tough decisions again this year. It is important that initiatives and programs that are helping all students continue as well as the individual needs of the students with disabilities be met appropriately.

We are going to again address areas and issues that we feel are very important for students in both General and Special Education.

- Hours Based Staffing – We would recommend continuing this. It seems in most cases student needs are being addressed with this type of staffing.
- Count Special Education Students in General Education Classes – This must continue in all classes so that appropriate staffing be allotted and proper services be given to ALL students.
- Transition Support Teachers (TST) – The TST is most important for ALL students to give the support needed for Planning and Transition to higher education and to adult service providers.
- Training for Para-educators – Para-educators are an integral part of each class, giving the support to the teachers and being a “teacher” to the students. It is important to retain and expand the training of Para-educators for them to help support the Teachers and provide the appropriate education for all students.
- Staff Development – Should be for Teachers and Para-educators not only with lecture classes, but done in the classroom with Master Teachers so that there is hands on experiences with the students.
- UDL (Universal Design for Learning) – An initiative that is helping all teachers to provide better services to students.
- School modernizations should continue on the schedule while funds have already been appropriated for them. It is important for Staff and Students that they have these modernizations for their moral and for good teaching areas.

MCPS has a continuum of services that is provided to students, it is important to retain this continuum to meet the needs of each student. We need to ensure that there is fair and appropriate testing in order to know these needs. We must make sure that the resources already available in MCPS be used in the best possible way for all students. Staff working in the schools needs to know the resources that are already in their respective schools and know how to use these resources and technology. Don't try to reinvent the wheel without looking at what is available.

We think if we look at three (3) E's – Efficient, Effective and Equitable. With principles like these applied to the resources available, we can continue to be a winning school system for all students.

If we can be of any help, please contact us. Thank you very much.....

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