

**Community Forum Testimony**  
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I am an independent college counselor working with MCPS students. College graduation is the endpoint we all seek, so where do we stand?

- 80% of our students graduate high school
- 75% of those graduates go on to college
- 49% of students who do go on to college graduate within six years

Therefore, about 30% of the students entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade emerge with a college degree even ten years later. To me, that's failure.

MCPS' goal is to have 80% of students ready for college by 2014. Especially in this economic climate, we need to identify the most effective programs and keep focused on the endpoint of college readiness, minimizing distractions, pet projects, and hype.

What works? We are seeing success in taking best practices from the highly gifted centers and sharing them as differentiation strategies in heterogeneous classrooms. Similarly, for our most challenging group—special needs students—the model practices from the Gifted and Talented/Learning Disabled (GT/LD) program, can help all students meet their goals for college readiness.

Even now, Marisa Stemple, MCPS Instructional Specialist, has expanded the GT/LD Advisory Committee to share best practices with teachers dealing with the heterogeneous advanced classes created by middle school reform, those working with learning disabled students in their home schools, and teachers of twice-exceptional students such as those with ADHD and Aspergers.

The GT/LD programs in Montgomery County are the key to getting students with learning differences to the college readiness goal. This nationally known program has been a “test bed” of innovative efforts to engage and motivate students and helps them become independent and successful. It is based on identifying students early, providing expert interventions, building on student strengths, using technology, differentiating instruction, and teaching effective learning strategies. Sounds like pie in the sky? It's not, it's been in place for years. (As an aside, by not identifying GT/LD students we are eliminating a population that can make AYP. With failures in the special education category at all levels, this is worth reviewing.)

Anecdotally, many professionals are convinced the GT/LD programs effectively bridge the skills gaps for college. I know they do because I send these students on to wonderful schools. These tested approaches can be used for all LD students and general ed students equally effectively. MCPS has purchased five years data on our graduates including retention and graduation rates. Let's thoughtfully explore this information by subgroups including special ed and GT/LD students in and out of the program to find what's most effective and confirm what works. More budget cuts are undoubtedly coming. We've made the investment in data, let's claim the return.