

**Testimony of
Deanna Duff
On Behalf of the
Gaithersburg High School PTSA**

**Montgomery County Board of Education
Community Forum
September 17, 2009**

Good evening. I am Deanna Duff, President of the Gaithersburg High School PTSA. Last year, MCPS introduced the “Seven Keys to College Readiness” campaign in order to illustrate a pathway for students “to be ready for college and to be better prepared to earn a four-year college degree.” One of the Seven Keys encourages students to take college-level courses via the AP or IB programs. These programs are designed to introduce college-level rigor to the high school curriculum and to better prepare our students for college.

Tonight, I want to encourage you to provide support for another honors program that serves these same goals: the College Institute program. The Gaithersburg PTSA asks the Board to prioritize its resources this year to ensure that college level programs at all schools, including the College Institute at Gaithersburg High School, are fully funded and give our students access to college-level rigor in the high school environment.

College Institute (CI) is a partnership program that provides high achieving high school seniors the opportunity to expand their course selection and earn college credits while still in high school. CI courses are taught at the high school by local college faculty and are supported and supervised by CI coordinators at the participating high school. CI compliments and extends opportunities beyond AP and honor courses offered at the school. CI courses do not aim to replace AP classes, but to “round out” a senior’s schedule with additional challenging coursework. Because these courses are taken at the high school during the school day, CI courses contribute to the high school’s rigor index measured by the Washington Post. In short, the College Institute equals college readiness.

CI was pioneered at Gaithersburg and Wootton High Schools in 2002. The program has been an unqualified success at both schools since that time, and was recently expanded to two additional high schools in the county. The program has grown every year it has been offered at Gaithersburg High School. This year, Gaithersburg will have over 120 students taking College Institute courses. That is approximately 25 percent of our graduating class this year.

But a program like College Institute can only be a success if it is adequately supported. Since its inception, we have had a coordinator working full time to support and nurture the students in our program. The CI coordinator helps identify students for the program,

assists with college applications, financial aid and scheduling, selects the courses that are compatible with the school's curriculum, coordinates with the Montgomery College professors and serves, in essence, as a teaching assistant for the courses. Unfortunately, the CI program received only a part-time allocation for this current year. This cut in support threatens the ability of our coordinator to perform these functions in the allotted time. We do not see how MCPS can support a program for 25 percent of our senior class with only a part-time coordinator position. And we fear that the program will not be able to continue to build on its success without the support of a full time coordinator. We believe that a full time coordinator at each of the schools is appropriate and necessary to fulfill CI's promises.

As Dr. Weast told the Board in January 2008, higher education partnerships such as the College Institute are aligned with the Board of Education's academic priorities.¹ Maintenance of such programs is a key component to "raising the bar" throughout all of our schools. Therefore, we ask that you maintain college ready programs such as the College Institute not only in name, but also in effectiveness. Please ensure that these programs receive adequate staffing to be successful. Thank you.

¹ Board of Education Agenda Item 10.0, January 8, 2008 meeting, Memorandum from Dr. Jerry D. Weast to BOE, at 1.