

I am **Dr. Lisa Beudet**, parent of a 5th grader at Takoma Park's Piney Branch Elementary School.

Members of the School Board, Dr. Weast, assembled parents and members of the community:

The mission of MCPS' strategic plan is "To provide a high-quality, world-class education that ensures success for every student through excellence in teaching and learning." Yet, we have heard in the roll-out of the "Seven Keys to College Readiness" that MCPS' grade level instructional program falls short of being world-class; indeed, MCPS itself has shown that on-grade-level instruction provides inadequate preparation for a successful college experience.

Though MCPS has waved the red flag, it has been largely left up to the parents, rather than the school system, to ensure that our children are on-track, enrolled in appropriate "advanced level" classes so they will be ready for college. But no matter, if they do not reach that level, MCPS can stand behind the "on-grade-level" mantra and claim success for all students. Well, it's time for those of us who really care about *all* our students to speak up! Every child can succeed only if *every* child is brought to a minimum level of competency, and in MCPS, this should be college-readiness. If college-readiness is not the goal of a 12-year elementary and high-school education, then I ask you, *what is?* I believe it is the duty of MCPS to ensure that *all* children are indeed ready to succeed in college if they choose to go.

In these difficult economic times, the MCPS strategic plan should focus on its' second stated goal, to "provide an effective instructional program". As part of this, I strongly feel we must raise the bar starting in Kindergarten (and earlier, in head-start programs), rapidly phasing in the 7-Keys criteria as the *new* standard for an "on-grade-level" curriculum.

How can this be accomplished? In my son's classrooms, I have observed some very talented teachers, skilled at providing differentiated instruction, continually multitasking to reach children in three different reading levels within a single classroom. It is exhausting to watch under the best of circumstances, and amounts to a 90-minute block with only 30 minutes of instructional time allotted to each child. Wouldn't it be better if each teacher were assigned only two reading levels, or better yet, only one? Why not regroup students for homogeneous reading and writing, just as MCPS does in mathematics instruction? More focused instructional time is the only way to provide adequate instruction for all children, and in these difficult economic times, increased instructional time can most readily be had at the expense of a bit of heterogeneity. Increased quality and quantity of instructional time is *especially* needed for those children at the two extremes: the truly struggling students and those who are highly able. Maybe if we stop expecting our teachers to be superhuman multitaskers, we could use their gifts more wisely and truly address the needs of *all* our students.

Finally, in order to regain "world-class" status, it is very important to continue to provide challenging material for our highly-able students. We must maintain robust magnet programs in middle school and high school, that can accommodate the

increasing levels to which our elementary students will be prepared. In elementary school, a combination of generally raising the bar, increased classroom homogeneity and generalization of the highly gifted (HG) center curriculum to at least a few high-level classrooms in all schools (for example, the piloting of the HG center reading curriculum at Piney Branch Elementary, now in its' second year) would go far in educating our most able learners, at the same time this strategy addresses the needs of all.

In these difficult economic times, I strongly urge MCPS to do the sensible thing: expect higher grade-level standards of all our students (patterned on the 7 Keys), increase quality and quantity of instruction to ensure students meet these higher standards, give them the incentive of tantalizing magnet courses and the ultimate reward of true college readiness, at and above the *new* "grade level".