

In a time of concern about budget cuts and shortfalls, we should use what we have and consider carefully what will make the most difference. As a community member, I request that Montgomery County invest in the education of children with disabilities and more fully use resources. To access the general education curriculum and succeed, children with disabilities need assistive technology, interventions, the collaboration of staff with different expertise, and Universal Design for Learning.

① Montgomery County has schools in different tech years, so promote the use and provide training to use fully the assistive technology available in each school. ② Increase awareness of interventions and response to intervention (RTI), and provide more training in reading and math interventions, so every child has access to the intervention that can make a difference. ③ Train general education teachers about disabilities and including children with disabilities in the classroom, and encourage collaboration between general education and special education because shared expertise leads to effective differentiation of the curriculum, which in turn benefits all students. Strategies and materials that equip students with disabilities to learn can facilitate how non-disabled students including ESOL students learn; for example, graphic organizers and study notes.

④ This is a century for research and technology that was science fiction a decade ago, and this is the century for people with disabilities. I marvel at what I see and what will be: bionic is no longer science fiction. To be a world-class school system in this century, embrace and invest in Universal Design for Learning. Universal Design for Learning can combine differentiation and technology to give all students more access to the general education curriculum and opportunities to demonstrate progress: imperative for children with disabilities and promising for non-disabled children. Just as automatic doors make it possible for some people with physical disabilities to enter buildings and provide easier access for others with small children or heavy packages, Universal Design for Learning can open the doors to learning for children with disabilities and facilitate learning for non-disabled children who have different learning styles or speak languages other than English. For example, with document cameras, text and pictures can be enlarged so students can see what is read, and an auditory lesson using one book becomes visual for all, benefiting visual learners and ESOL students. Students can access dictionaries or simpler text to learn the same content. With Universal Design for Learning, instruction can be customized to meet students' needs. Schools can go beyond exposure to the curriculum to active participation for all students.

I can see what can be and ask that Montgomery County invest in the education of children with disabilities and more fully use resources to benefit all students. *All children can and should have a quality education and the opportunity to reach their potential.*