

Dear President O'Neill and Members of the Board of Education:

We have carefully read the proposed revision of Policy IQD posted to the BoE website, as well as the minority report presented to you on October 24, 2005. We have also discussed the purposes of extracurricular activities and the notion of "academic eligibility".

We find considerable merit to the arguments presented in the minority position and urge the Board to modify the draft revision of Policy IQD accordingly. We suggest that in Section C (Position), near or around line 41, wording should be included to indicate that a student who falls below the minimum standard for participation (2.0 average and/or no more than one "E") shall be permitted extracurricular eligibility provided that the student signs up for academic support, participates in an academic support program, and demonstrates steady academic improvement. It may seem reasonable to most to permit such extracurricular activity only for a provisional period, for example one calendar (or one academic) year, and we recognize that the length of any such provisional period and the details of deciding what constitutes satisfactory academic improvement are probably best left for the accompanying regulatory document (IQD-RA?).

But, from a broader perspective, we question the wisdom of linking access to extracurricular activities to a specified level of academic accomplishment. The mission of our system of public education is much broader than is implied in the old adage about the "3 Rs". We as a society expect our schools to convey not only knowledge, but also skills and attitudes; we expect MCPS to prepare our children to be contributing members of our democratic society. For many of our children the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they learn by participation in extracurricular activities are every bit as important as those they learn in more traditional academic activities. It makes no more sense to deprive students access to a full range of extracurricular activities for failing to fully participate or failing to achieve academic improvement in an academic support program, than it would to deprive such students food and water for such failings. Hungry students cannot learn. Poorly performing students deprived of being "recreated" through extracurricular activities will never want to learn.

As the Board considers revisions to Policy IQD we ask that it keep in mind the larger social cost of academic ineligibility. Many of the students likely to become academically ineligible are also those most vulnerable to gang recruiting and other destructive behaviors. The social cost of ineligibility may indeed be greater than the academic cost. As a follow-on to the revisions made to Policy IQD, we believe that MCPS must provide a full program of non-academically-tied extracurricular activities, with some addressing the needs/interests of students not destined for college, to prepare them for post-high school careers.

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