

April 4, 2005

Dr. Weast, Representatives of the State Department of Education, my name is Mark Adelman, Chair of the Education Committee of the Montgomery County Civic Federation. I am here to testify in support of the M-PAC recommendations. We especially approve of the calls for a trustful environment and the need for annual reports to the State. Indeed, we urge that the document be strengthened so as to help local school districts in the difficult task of engaging all stakeholders in the education of our children. We believe the document should more clearly define how local school systems will be held accountable for achieving the desired level of community involvement, and how the community will be asked if the level achieved is satisfactory.

While most parents and citizens recognize the expertise of teachers in the educational process, all can see that our public school systems now have a far more complex responsibility than simply teaching what **we** were taught when we went to school. Public schools must increasingly deal with the many socio-political issues that characterize the broader educational missions of our democracy. And community members are less-easily convinced that Boards of Education (whom we elect) and School Administrators (whom they hire) have any inherently-greater expertise in these societal issues than do we. This is the case even in Montgomery County, which is reputed to have an excellent public school system.

Unfortunately, we feel we must use this testimony as an opportunity to file a negative report on our own school system, by urging that MCPS and the Montgomery County Board of Education show more authentic interest in, and respect for, the opinions of all parents and other citizens of the County. We regret that recent actions of the BoE suggest to many citizens and parents that we are not truly welcome at the table when issues related to the education of our children are being discussed and critical decisions are being made. Rather than list a series of instances in which Board actions have generated citizen distrust, I will only call attention to one: the recent proposal to revise Policy FAA (Long-Range Educational Facilities Planning). By comparing the proposed revised policy with the existing policy statement, we are led to the conclusion that the intent is to reduce the involvement of parents and concerned citizens in these decisions. Our perception is shared by many in the Montgomery County Council of PTAs, and the failure of the Board and the Superintendent to respond to our requests for a dialogue on this matter adds more weight to the growing public perception that MCPS does not in fact subscribe to the principles of community involvement embodied in the M-PAC recommendations.

We understand how the Board and the Superintendent, struggling as they are with increasingly complex tasks and ever more burdensome demands for "demonstrated progress" might be tempted to "streamline" the decision-making process. But these are **our** children, being educated with **our** tax dollars, to play a pivotal role in the future of **our** society. We expect to be **full** partners in the process. We are ready and willing to have meaningful dialogue about the multiple decisions that must be made, dialogue that can only be held in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect. Dialogue that involves all parties asking questions, and listening to

answers proffered. The Civic Federation is ready and willing to participate in such dialogue. We ask the State Department of Education to help Montgomery County's Board of Education and its Public School System find a way to make sure this dialogue occurs.

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