

The Montgomery County Education Forum (MCEF)

The *Montgomery County Education Forum* is a group of concerned parents, teachers, and community members who have studied, discussed, and researched tracking (or rigid ability grouping) and want to turn around the negative impact tracking has on all children in our Public Schools.

OUR GOALS-- Our goal is to ensure educational equity for all children in MCPS through a grass roots campaign to:

Increase community awareness of the relationship between tracking and the achievement gap;

Begin to close the gap in Montgomery County by abolishing tracking.

OUR BELIEFS-- We believe that:

All students deserve an equal opportunity for a quality education;

Rigid ability grouping or tracking policies and practices perpetuate race and class-based inequities and institutionalize low expectations by placing high proportions of poor children and children of color in lower tiered learning tracks.

Tracking policies and practices in MCPS are major contributors to the growing achievement gap.

Tracking of poor, Latino and African American children must be abolished to close the gap.

What is Tracking

Tracking is defined as “the rigid and static assignment of students to classes, programs, or schools on the basis of ability, achievement, or teacher/counselor judgment for a long period of time with no options, and with whole group instruction as the predominant mode of instruction”¹.

Not all grouping practices are tracking. Ability grouping that is short-term, flexible, and frequently evaluated and where children can be regrouped according to evaluations are common instructional practices that are used effectively to meet specific learning goals.

How Children Are Tracked in Montgomery County

Tracking in MCPS begins with “Gifted and Talented” (GT) program policies and practices in elementary schools, which create the foundation for an achievement gap for students of color and lower socioeconomic status. Once identified as gifted and talented, students carry this designation throughout their school career paving the way for entry into and success in honors classes in middle school, and honors, AP and magnet programs in high school. The “non-gifted” students are left behind. The longer students remain in their respective tracks, the more they diverge academically -- they become increasingly segregated and the achievement gap widens.

Elementary School

Students are tested and identified as “gifted and talented”, in some schools, as early as kindergarten. This identification entitles one group of students (GT) to unique enrichment opportunities with a variety of hands-on, creative learning experiences. The remainder of students, with disproportionately large

representation among the poor and students of color, are identified for their teachers as NOT gifted or talented, setting expectations that appear to remain throughout their school careers. Most experts in the GT field estimate that gifted students make up 3 to 5% of the population. In MCPS, around 33% are identified as gifted and talented.

Middle School

The gap grows wider as these students are placed in selective, enriched gifted and talented, honors and accelerated classes in middle schools. Most middle schools offer “advanced” classes for all core academic subjects. Students are recommended for these placements by elementary school teachers. Clearly, students identified early as GT and given enrichment opportunities are most likely to move on to higher level work in middle school.

High School

By ninth grade, the educational inequities institutionalized through gifted programs in elementary and middle school have defined the subset of students who are adequately prepared to participate in Magnet, Honors and AP classes. Honors and magnet classes are predominantly white and Asian, “regular” and low-level classes are predominantly made up of African American and Latino students.

Tracking and Civil Rights Law

Tracking diminishes or denies educational opportunity because:

Students placed in certain classes or programs receive fewer resources

Certain classes or programs, because of their structural rigidity or inefficacy, place limitations on the educational potential of students in those classes or programs

Certain programs unnecessarily stigmatize students

¹ MCPS, Committee Report on Student Grouping Practices, July 1994, p. 15.

Join Us!

We invite you to join MCEF and the Equity in Education Coalition in its **No Labels, No Limits!** campaign.

Beginning in spring 2005, MCEF helped form the Equity in Education Coalition (EEC). The coalition's initial goal is to put an end to the second grade global screening that sorts children into "gifted" and "NOT gifted" tracks and, instead, implement high quality education for all children in MCPS. We can stop sorting our children and competing for "scarce" resources NOW.

Here's how you can help:

Join our group. Contact us. Let us know what skills you can contribute to this effort. Offer to testify at the Board of Education., attend rallies, press conferences. Bring your fellow parents, teachers or students. There's much to do and **you** can help!

Keep informed. Send us your e-mail address, home address, phone numbers. We will inform you of opportunities to participate in meetings, actions, trainings, and special events.

Invite us to speak to your group. We will send speakers to your group—small or large, PTA, other school-based or community organization or church group. Everyone needs to understand how tracking contributes to the achievement gap.

Send us your tracking story. MCEF is developing a collection of personal stories about how tracking works in MCPS schools and how it has affected children and families in Montgomery County. Send us **your** story by e-mail or mail or call us up and tell us about it!

Contribute \$\$ MCEF needs funds for this campaign. Contributions of any size will be gratefully accepted and are tax deductible; we now have 501.c.3 status.

Yes! I'd like to participate in MCEF and EEC's **No Labels, No Limits!** campaign. I will

Come to meetings, forums, actions, etc.

Send you my own "tracking" story

Invite you to speak to my group

Contribute: \$10 \$25 other

(Make checks payable to: MCEF)

Put me on your mailing list

Your Name:

First: _____

Last: _____

Your Group/ Organization:

I am a:

Parent _____ Student _____

Teacher _____ Community Member _____

School(s): _____

Address: _____

E-mail: _____

Phones: (H) _____

(W) _____

Mail completed form and your check to:

MCEF, 3206 Univ. Blvd. W.

Kensington, MD 20895

Contact us TODAY!

Denise Young, MCEF cochair

Evie Frankl, MCEF cochair

Phone: 301-589-6707

E-Mail eviegene@verizon.net

Website: www.mcef.org

Montgomery County Education Forum

Advocating for
Educational
Equity in
Montgomery
County