

MCEF Press Conference, October 24, 2005
At Carver, Re: EEC and Grade 2 Global Screening Report
by Mark R. Adelman

Good evening. I'm Mark Adelman, speaking on behalf of the Montgomery County Education Forum and in conjunction with our partners in the Equity in Education Coalition. In June of this year we held another press conference, in this same location, to urge the Board of Education to bring an end to the inequitable educational practices of the Montgomery County Public School System. We demanded an end to the use of the Grade 2 Global Screening process as a tool to justify the segregation of our children into two arbitrary categories, one of which does not receive the full benefit of educational resources to which all our children are entitled. We promised that we would be evaluating the results of the most recent cycle of this Global Screening and would return if the data showed that the failures of the system continued. MCPS published this report last month and it shows that the problems continue. We are back. And we repeat our demand that the Board and MCPS cease the use of this flawed process.

It is critical to a democratic society that all children receive the best education possible, independent of their ethnic or socioeconomic background. We elect members of the Board of Education to make sure this occurs. And they hire a Superintendent of Schools and other employees of MCPS to fulfill this mission, a mission that is so widely valued that citizens of Montgomery County are willing to allocate over half the County budget to our system of public education. Yet the Board and MCPS persist in using a flawed screening process as the basis for labelling nearly half of all our kids as "gifted and talented" and the other half as NOT. The Board and the Superintendent will tell you that COMAR (the legal code of our State), in its various articles, requires this. But anyone who has read COMAR knows that these articles are extremely brief, have almost no detailed instructions, and leave most operational decisions to local authority. This is the article dealing with the education of gifted and talented students. It says nothing about how such students are to be identified and educated. It does not suggest that the identification process should identify between 30 and 50% of all of our kids as gifted and talented, and the rest as NOT, which is precisely what occurs in our County. More importantly, COMAR says nothing even remotely suggestive that students who are NOT so designated are to be given a second class education. But that is exactly what happens in our County. It happens every day, every year, and in many ways. And it is not a random process, because MCPS's OWN DATA show that african-american and hispanic-american students are about TWICE as likely as caucasian-american and asian-american kids to be labelled as NOT gifted and talented. Think about that, and think about what happens to a kid who is labelled NOT? To his/her self-esteem and drive? To the attitude that other students develop about him/her (and themselves)? To the teachers who are given lower level curricula to teach the NOT?

The Board and the Superintendent have repeatedly expressed concern about the achievement gap and how difficult it will be to close that gap. We share their concern and understand the work that lies ahead. What they do not yet understand is that the practices of inequitable education (and this is NOT simply a matter of dollars) are part of the problem, NOT part of the solution. I have spoken and written about the flaws of how MCPS chooses to use its "gifted and talented" selection process - and will have more to say about it in the future. MCEF has spoken and written about the evils of the "tracking" used by MCPS - and we will have more to say about that in the future. But we are NOT back here today to discuss such details. We are here because our community CANNOT allow this Board of Education and this System of Public Education to continue to perpetuate the myth that "two sizes of education fits all students". Each and every child is an individual, with talents and needs, and no system that relies on tiers or tracks to sort kids into convenient bins can even begin to deal with these differences, nor is any such system even remotely compatible with the democratic principles we all hold dear. We MUST not allow the Grade 2 Global Screening process to continue to label nearly half our students as entitled to high quality education and the rest as entitled to so much less. We demand an end to the use of this flawed process as a method for the de facto justification of inequitable educational practices in Montgomery County. I repeat our slogan, because it is not simply a slogan: it is the rallying call that this Board and this System will continue to hear until they get the message and ACT. NO LABELS, NO LIMITS!