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Parent Groups Decry Disparate Treatment in Montgomery Schools

Rockville, MD – October 24, 2005 -- The African American Parents of Montgomery County (AAPMC), the NAACP Parents' Council (Parents' Council), Progressive Maryland (PM) and the Montgomery County Education Forum (MCEF), along with other parent and student groups and individuals, decry the even more than previously devastating inequitable results of the 2nd grade global screening process as reported in the September *An Examination of the Grade 2 Global Screening for the Identification of Gifted and Talented Students*. The process sorts the county's children into "gifted and talented" (GT) and NOT gifted and talented students along race and class-based lines and, thus begins tracking 7-year olds into disparate educational opportunities.

GT children in Montgomery County receive enriched and innovative instruction that prepares them for honors, AP, magnet programs and college. Non-GT children receive "regular" instruction—on- or below-grade level courses—and thus, are tracked into limited academic and life options. It is no accident that African American and Latino SAT scores in the county grow worse from year to year. Students' futures are being determined at the end of second grade by the MCPS global screening process.

According to the recent MCPS report, Latino children actually fared **worse** than in previous years – their share of the GT pie going down from 13.9 to 10.6 percent even though they represent over 20 percent of the school population. And African American children's representation continues to hover proportionally at about half their representation in the system **despite** a modified screening process intended to correct this problem. The demographics of the gifted and talented program in Montgomery County remain as dismally lopsided as ever. While last year an astonishing 57 percent of white children in the county were identified as GT, this year only 46 percent of white students were so identified. This number still shrieks in sharp contrast to the 19 percent of African American students and 17 percent of Latino students identified.

And one would have to question the legitimacy and the integrity of the entire process, when Montgomery County identifies 30-50 percent of its students as gifted when the national norm is between 2 and 5 percent.

Superintendent Jerry Weast, last week, lauded the initiative in which 42 percent of students being taught 6th grade math in 5th grade had not been identified as gifted and talented. “So screening makes no difference anymore,” he said. “It is opportunity, it is delivery.” ¹

Groups and individuals across the county, including AAPMC, the Parents’ Council, PM and the MCEF, applaud providing appropriate challenge for children WITHOUT labeling them. We ask Dr. Weast, if screening makes no positive difference and is, in fact, harmful to children of color and poor children in terms of lowered expectations and disparate educational opportunity, WHY DO WE CONTINUE TO DO IT?

The MCPS School Academic Grouping Practices Regulation mandates that the county is responsible “for assuring that grouping practices do not result in racially segregated classes or disproportionate distribution of students by gender and race.” ² Yet in practice, the GT-designation has created a segregated school system out of one that is intrinsically and wonderfully diverse. “One has to wonder about the legality of such a system,” said Delegate Ana Sol Gutierrez, former member of the Montgomery County Board of Education. “I question the lack of equity in distributing resources, like high quality teachers and challenging curriculum, that result in equal learning opportunity for all students.”

We demand an end to the use of this flawed screening process as a justification for inequitable educational practices and distribution of resources in Montgomery County. The global screening process is harmful to students and to our school system and must be halted.

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¹ *Despite more in honors classes, parents still disappointed*, Montgomery Gazette, Oct. 19, 2005

² Montgomery County Public Schools Regulation School Academic Grouping Practices, formerly Regulation No. 510-5, August 3, 1977, revised October 20, 1995. Retrieved from:
<http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/departments/policy/pdf/ihbra.pdf>