

Sent via email on January 10, 2017

## **Testimony to Superintendent Smith and the Montgomery County Board of Education**

### **Proposed FY2018 Operating Budget**

Dear Dr. Smith and Members of the Board of Education,

I am writing in *opposition* to the reduction of hours for PEP INC Classes, from 3.0 to 2.5 hours per day.

Students in the Pre-School Education Program, Intensive Needs Class are highly impacted by their disabilities. As the mother of a former PEP INC student, I know that this particular population needs supports such as extra time to transition between activities and built-in break times.

This description, from MCPS Superintendent Memorandum dated Sept 2010 (document link at bottom), provides a brief summary of the program:

#### **PEP Intensive Needs Class (INC)**

*Serving students with severe communication and sensory integration needs, PEP INC provides specialized instruction in a highly structured environment. The program helps students learn in a small group environment and helps prepare them for larger group learning. Parent/caregiver support is integrated into the instructional day, assisting students in generalizing skills learned in the classroom setting. Students attend class five days/week, for three hours each day.*

Attachment C of the Memorandum also describes the other PEP Programs. The original three hour (1/2 day) allocation for PEP INC was intentional. Given that the needs of the students served in this environment have not changed, a reduction in the number of service hours will not be of educational benefit to them. In fact, a reduction could result in negative outcomes.

Thirty minutes a day of lost time would not affect most adults but 2.5 hours a week of lost time for a young child who is already developmentally delayed could be extremely detrimental.

To give you an idea of what is at stake, and the positive impact that this three hour a day program has had on its young students, I share the following letter with you that I wrote in Feb 2004:

*Dear MCCPTA/Special Needs Committee:*

*The dedication and commitment of the staff involved in the Preschool Education Program, Intensive Needs Class at Jackson Road Elementary School inspired me to nominate them for your award.*

*Many young children, including my son Michael, have benefited tremendously from the PEP, INC program at Jackson Road Elementary School. The teacher, aides and support*

*staff have consistently provided a structured, nurturing environment where children with disabilities can learn.*

*When Michael entered the program two years ago he did not have words, only tears. Because of the intense interventions he has received at school Michael can now sing songs, identify colors, and count numbers, both forward and backward. In addition, Michael recites prayers at mealtime and can say the words that every parent wants to hear, "I love you."*

*Thanks to the PEP, INC program Michael has also learned other critical life skills. Prior to entering school Michael could not attend to important tasks or transition between activities. These problem areas seriously impeded his development. Now he is a willing participant in his own education - most mornings he runs to get on the school bus.*

*This wonderful program has done more than prepare Michael and his peers for that next big step, Kindergarten. It has prepared them for that long journey, "Life."*

*Sincerely,*

*Jeanne Taylor*

Given what we know about the PEP, INC program, and what it provides to the young students it serves, I urge you to put our children first. Please restore the number of budgeted hours to three per day.

Thank you for your time, attention and consideration.

Jeanne Taylor

MCCPTA Special Education Committee Chair &  
Volunteer Parent Advocate