

April 10, 2018

County Council Testimony-Montgomery County School Psychologists' Association (MCSPA)

Presented by Allison Jacobus, Co-President of MCSPA

On behalf of the Montgomery County School Psychologists' Association, I would like to thank the members of the County Council for this opportunity.

School psychologists are trained to provide a full range of services for students and schools including classroom behavior support, counseling, intervention planning, threat assessment, and suicide prevention to name a few. However, due to high student to staff ratios, school psychologists spend the majority of their time meeting legal requirements related to special education, which limits their ability to provide mental health services to the general population of students who also need this critical support.

Currently, about half of our comprehensive school psychologists are serving 3 or more schools. Our ratio of 1 school psychologist for 1875 students far exceeds the nationally recommended ratio of 1 school psychologist to only 700 students. For local comparison, Howard County Public Schools has a ratio of 1 school psychologist for every 830 students.

With an average growth of 3000 new students every year and about 1 new school opening yearly, a minimum of 2 new school psychologist positions must be added each year by MCPS just to maintain our inadequate status quo. And yet, the current staffing formula does not include any increases in psychologist staffing as the student population increases. Therefore, each year that goes by without increased psychologist staffing worsens our current staff to student ratios. And with approximately a fifth of our students experiencing a mental health disorder each year, the County simply cannot afford to allow this continue.

MCSPA provided testimony to the Board of Education in January on this dire need for mental health support in our schools. Our recommendation to the Board was to add 16 new school psychologist positions over the course of 5 years to reduce the ratios to approximately 1 to 1500 students. Our recommendation is a conservative one, especially when you consider that we would need to hire 150 more school psychologists to reach the nationally recommended ratio. The Board recognized the need for additional school-based mental health professionals and recommended adding more new school psychologist positions to the current budget. I ask that the County Council approve the Board's recommendation of additional positions, which will materially lower

the ratio of school psychologists to students and allow more students to receive individualized mental health support.

Our organization is aware of the dire fiscal climate our school system currently finds itself in and the difficult funding decisions that the County Council is faced with every year. However, we must make our students' mental health a priority and add more school psychologists to support students, because mental health services can not only improve a student's ability to learn, but quite simply **can save lives**. More information about this proposal can be found in the MCSPA Ratio Proposal document provided to you along with this testimony. Thank you for your time and consideration.