

January 10, 2018

**BOE Testimony-Montgomery County School Psychologists' Association (MCSPA)**

*Presented by Allison Jacobus and Jeanne McCormack, Co-Presidents of MCSPA*

On behalf of the Montgomery County School Psychologists' Association, we would like to thank Dr. Smith, Dr. Navarro, Dr. Brice, Mr. Lowndes, Dr. Lang, Dr. Statham, Mr. Durso, members of the Board of Education, and executive and leadership staff for hearing our testimony.

School psychologists play a unique role in MCPS by helping schools promote academic achievement, positive student behavior, and emotional well-being for all students in Montgomery County. School psychologists provide a full range of services for students and schools including classroom behavior support, counseling, suicide prevention, and intervention planning to name a few. Our role is so often misunderstood or unknown to the general public because our work with students and families is confidential and sensitive. Often people will say, "But don't you only work with students in special education?" While it is true that we spend a great deal of our time working with students who receive special education because of legal timelines related to their services, the vision of our role within MCPS by both our organization and the Department of Psychological Services is far more comprehensive than what is currently able to be provided due to incredibly high staff to student ratios.

At this time, about half of our comprehensive school psychologists are serving 3 or more schools with an average of 1875 students per school psychologist. While our current ratio reflects a historical decrease as a result of this Board's previous commitment to improving staff ratios to allow for more student services, the ratio remains almost three times the recommended ratio of 1 psychologist for every 700 students from the National Association of School Psychologists. Despite our sizable ratios, school psychologists in Montgomery County work tirelessly to support the intensive mental health needs of our growing population of students. Just this school year, school psychologists have provided ...sessions of individual therapy and .... sessions of group therapy to students all over this county. School psychologists have managed to provide these services despite our high ratios and the demands of meetings and federally mandated timelines. Imagine how many more students could receive school-based mental health services if school psychologists had fewer schools and a more reasonable staffing ratio.

Each year, as the County's student population increases, more and more students enter our system with significant mental health needs. As a result, each year it becomes more and more apparent that there are too few of us to adequately meet the mental health

needs of our 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 just to maintain our inadequate status quo. However, with about a quarter of our students experiencing mental health disorders in a given year, it would be in the entire system's best interest to reduce our ratios to a level where we can attempt to meet the mental health needs of our students, instead of just meeting legal requirements. MCSPA's recommendation to the Board is to consider adding 16 new psychologist positions over the course of 5 years to reduce ratios to approximately 1/1500 students and increase the number of full time comprehensive psychologists from 86 to 102. 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 of 1 school psychologist for 700 students. We are aware of the dire fiscal climate our school system currently finds itself in and the difficult funding decisions that this Board is faced with every year. However, we must make our students' mental health a priority and add more school psychologists to support our students, because mental health services can not only improve a student's ability to learn, but quite simply **can save lives**. For more information about the positive impact school psychologists have on student achievement and mental well being, and for our association's proposed plan for improving school psychologist to student ratios, please refer to the Montgomery County School Psychologists' Association Staffing Ratio Proposal 2017 document provided to you along with this testimony. Thank you for your time and consideration.