

My name is Matt Kamins. I am a school psychologist entering my 30th year in the Montgomery County Public Schools. It was as a school psychologist and later supervisor of psychological services that I came to know Penny.

There was no one like Penny. She had a combination of clinical training and social justice perspective that made her peerless. She was compassionate, dogged, resilient, and focused. She fought for her kids and their families and the staff with passion and wisdom, sometimes bucking the system and its short-sighted administration.

When I first joined MCPS in 1989, Penny was already a champion for equal rights, mental wellness and the critical role of social emotional learning. She championed the first (and still only) system wide suicide training. She made us all aware of the power of “first finders” - those friends or family that know that a friend, family member or loved one is so distraught they are about to hurt themselves. She made it our business to find and listen to those first finders so that we would step up and prevent harm.

She pushed for the system to recognize how reading difficulties could mar the well-being of students and make them depressed and sad and unwilling to try. She sided with problem solving practices that enabled teachers and specialists to sit together – equally – and search for solutions to school problems.

But, most importantly she was a teacher and mentor. She offered her mentorship without expectation for pay back. She

was always there for me to discuss system issues, a new intervention, new practices, and innovation. She offered insightful comments, asking about questions about timing, impact on staff, and impact on students. She was respected by her peers here in Montgomery County, by her colleagues across the state, and for several years she was the face of the National Association of School Psychologists.

Even after retirement, she continued to serve. She never left the profession and continued to mentor new school psychologists, continued to teach and learn.

Then there was her wit and acerbic sense of humor. So funny, yet simultaneously compassionate.

Unique, one of a kind, passionate, empathetic, skilled – our friend, teacher and mentor – she will be missed.