March 12, 2024

VIA EMAIL ONLY

The Honorable Marc Elrich

Montgomery County Executive

Executive Office Building

Rockville, MD 20850

Dear County Executive Elrich,

We, the undersigned, are very concerned about the lack of reading progress being made by MCPS students, starting in third grade and continuing into upper grades.

The status quo is not working, especially given the obvious losses to learning that occurred during Covid remote learning.

We are asking you to be a change agent in your budget submission for MCPS for the coming fiscal year.

We need a strong message from you to MCPS that it’s long past time they made the improvement of reading scores a major priority. We need your leadership at this critical time.

In Montgomery County as a whole, only 57 % of third graders are reading at or above grade level according to the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program results. That number, however, masks the even more alarming rates in many of our County’s schools. At Arcola Elementary, the number is 39%-- at Joann Leleck Elementary, 34%.

According to a national study, “Double Jeopardy: Third Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation,” children reading below grade level in third grade are four times less likely to graduate high school. Add family poverty to the mix and the results are even worse.

And, of course, this problem affects Latino and African American kids to an even greater extent than white and Asian children. Overall 49% of African-American children and 33% of Latino children achieve third grade reading proficiency. It’s 81% of white children and 79% of Asian children.

We know that significant learning loss took place in County schools due to the pandemic.

Present fourth graders were then in kindergarten or first grade. Results indicate that, barring some change, they will catch up with where they should have been then in four more years, when they are eighth graders.

If this isn’t the definition of an emergency for the Montgomery County Public Schools – and the County in general – we don’t know what is.

Twenty years ago, the County Executive, County Council, Superintendent and the School Board got together before passing a budget to make sure the system implemented smaller class sizes. Our kids’ education was too important to be just the work of the school board.

MCPS hired a consultant in Fall,2023 to provide support for elementary school reading at 9 schools at a cost of $950,000. Why wouldn’t we extend it to at least our 35 Title I schools or design a different program to get results?

Last Spring, you and the Council approved a budget that was $158m above MOE with **no strings attached to ensure the money was being targeted.** And now, MCPS is asking for over $150m more for 2024-25.

**You and the Council can make sure that money is focused on helping kids to read by requiring MCPS to enact a targeted program as part of their budget.** It doesn't require more money; it just requires targeting the resources they already have. You and the Council control the purse strings; MCPS can come up with the program that would have a sense of urgency lacking today. We are happy to work with you, the Council and the Board to assist our kids.

If we are truly about racial equity and social justice, nothing is more important than helping all our young children down a path toward success. If we don't, then shame on us.

That’s why we are asking you to demonstrate commitment and leadership in your recommendations about the MCPS budget request to the County Council.

Sincerely,

Steven Silverman

Gail Ewing

Nancy Floreen

Michael Knapp

Michael Subin

Chris Barclay

Judy Docca

Barbara Ebel

Stewart Edelstein

Sol Graham

Jason Green

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CC:

County Council

Board of Education

Monique Felder, Interim Superintendent MCPS

Essie McGuire, Council Staff