



LDAMC inc.

LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MD, INC.

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Jan. 7, 2007

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A Letter to Oppose the Closing of the Learning Centers in Montgomery County Public Schools

About 30 years ago, a group of highly qualified and progressive educators working for Montgomery County Public Schools, developed a program for a neglected population of struggling students who had a “hidden handicap”—Learning Disabilities. That program was called Secondary Learning Centers.

The program’s model of a “school-within-a school” was cutting edge. It allowed students, who were severely impacted by their Learning Disability, to receive specialized instruction in a small-class size setting, yet still attend a General Academic Public School. It quickly became a model program, not only throughout the Washington, D.C. region, but around the country.

The Learning Centers provided and continue to provide a place where students, who had previously experienced frustration and feelings of failure, can achieve success and maintain increased self esteem for the first time in their school career.

Montgomery County Public Schools benefited also. Many students who had been placed in private schools AT THE COUNTY’S EXPENSE were able to return to public education. Learning Centers continue to provide a program for some students who might otherwise have to be placed in a private setting.

To date, thousands of Learning Center students have graduated from MCPS, all having met the requirements for a Maryland State Diploma giving them the opportunity to have a successful life in adult society. Hundreds continued onto College and professional careers.

Much of the proposal to eliminate the Learning Centers is driven by the No Child Left Behind Act. THE BOARD NEEDS TO REMEMBER that they are also LEGALLY BOUND by other Federal Laws, in particular, IDEA. The binding philosophy of IDEA is that every child is to receive a “free and appropriate public education... in the least restrictive environment.” For these students, the Learning Center IS the Least Restrictive Environment, which was DETERMINED TO BE SO BY THE LEGALLY BINDING IEP PROCESS. If these students could be successful in the General Education Academic setting that is where the IEP process would have placed them.

The Learning Center’s “school-within-a school” model provides the best of both worlds for these students—a learning environment in which they can grow and succeed that is located in the halls of the schools of their able learning peers.

A move to a larger learning environment would be a step BACKWARDS for a Learning Center student. It is a RETURN to the place of frustration, anxiety and failure.

DO NOT close the Secondary Learning Centers and place students back into a situation in which they have already been left behind.

LDAMC officially opposes the proposed elimination of the Learning Centers by MCPS.

Sincerely, The Board of the Learning Disabilities Association of Montgomery County