

SHELDON FISHMAN AND VALERIE ERVIN: A COMPARISON

	SHELDON FISHMAN	VALERIE ERVIN*
ACHIEVEMENT	<p>MCPS must raise outcomes for African American and Hispanic students while raising the bar for all students. The strategies below are backed by research, experience, and common sense.</p> <p>INSTRUCTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct frequent built-in assessments of student progress and provide timely, useful feedback to teachers and parents. - Intervene as soon as a student begins to fall behind using tested and proven strategies, including supplemental classes and tutoring. - Group children flexibly by need to provide challenging and appropriate instruction for all. - Expand pre-school programs and all-day kindergarten. Extend “Star Search” systemwide to actively recruit African American and Hispanic students into accelerated programs. - Maximize classroom instructional time by eliminating distractions and redundant testing and provide tools and supports to improve classroom discipline. - Foster pride in achievement, enthusiasm for learning, and respect for knowledge. <p>CURRICULUM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implement a coherent, content-rich curriculum anchored in knowledge and understanding of (1) key historical and geographical facts and relationships, (2) core mathematical skills (including pencil-and-paper computation) needed for advanced math and science courses, (3) key scientific laws, theories, and systems, (4) standard grammar, good writing, and the literary classics, and (5) the vocabulary needed to read, write, and talk fluently about all of the above. - Overhaul the middle school curriculum to better prepare students for challenging high school courses. 	<p>Montgomery County has one of the nation's finest school systems, but it is not performing for all students.*</p> <p>INSTRUCTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offer ‘gifted and talented’ quality learning opportunities for all students. “We have to use the Gifted and Talented methodology for everyone.”(1) - Balance the emphasis on standardized testing with the need to foster creativity and a love of learning in the classroom - Work with teachers to improve accountability and quality of instruction - Foster a love of learning for both students and teachers. - Support high teacher expectations for all children - Provide extra math/English classes, Saturday school and other mentoring and tutoring programs <p>CURRICULUM</p>

RESOURCES

- Support Superintendent Weast’s current policy of providing additional resources to schools with high educational loads, but introduce accountability to ensure that the money is being spend on programs and measures that work.

STAFF

- Introduce incentives to retain teachers in highly impacted schools.

RESOURCES

- “Distribute resources to create greater equity of resources between the haves and the have-nots. This will take a determined posture on the part of the BOE to design a school system that creates opportunities rather than one that simply reinforces inequities.”(2)

Note: MCPS currently spends substantially more per child in “high impact” schools.—Fishman campaign.

- Lower class size.

STAFF

- Continue to provide competitive pay and benefits to assure that MCPS draws and retains the best educators



From published statements of the Montgomery County Education Forum (MCEF), co-founded and co-chaired (until spring 2004) by Valerie Ervin:

“While some students have access to the best programs, instruction, and resources, about 70 to 75 percent of MCPS students are being ‘tracked’ out of [the best] programs, instruction, and resources, and into academic failure.”(4)

“The Montgomery County Education Forum holds that MCPS ability grouping policies and practices are largely responsible for educational disparities because they institutionalize low expectations for students of color.”(3)

[Recommendations] “Eliminate ‘GT’ (‘gifted and talented’) designation.”(3)

“Eliminate designations of levels in courses with ‘honors’ and ‘regular’ labels in which the curriculum and assessments are the same but students are separated for the sake of separation.”(3)

Note: We are not aware of any courses in which the “honors” label is used to separate students for the sake of separation.”—Fishman Campaign

“Make sure all parents are informed . . . about . . . honors, magnets, AP and GT *as long as these exist.*” (3) [Emphasis added]

		<p><i>Note: The comprehensive model for secondary school instruction endorsed by this group seems to be one in which all students are taught on the same level, a model implemented by a New York school district whose administrators were featured speakers at an MCEF forum in December 2003 and again in May 2004.—Fishman Campaign</i></p>
<p>GRADING AND REPORTING POLICY</p>	<p>“A consistent grading system based on mastery is a good idea. But like so many MCPS initiatives, the new policy was rolled out county-wide with no systematic testing and inadequate thought to the impact on teachers and students. This is especially problematical for high school students, whose futures are being jeopardized by inconsistent application of poorly understood grading methods. I question the merit of awarding 50 points for incomplete work; I see little advantage to a 0-4 grading scale; and I anticipate serious problems with the homework policy. All these changes should be tested in a limited, well-designed pilot.”(6)</p>	<p>“The new grading policy is an attempt to align the grading policy with new standards. It is also an attempt to focus on what children know and are able to do. This is the information that teachers, parents and children need to be able to chart a course for progress. There will be separate assessments for effort, but effort will not be confused with mastery. Operationalizing the new policy has proved to be problematic. And its approach seems harsh to many people. But, I believe that if we change our perspective of grades as reward or punishment to one of diagnosis, the new system will be able to help us address children’s needs effectively.”(6)</p>
<p>BUDGET</p>	<p>Greater accountability and transparency are needed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cut legal expenses by correcting adversarial approach to parents of students with special needs - Implement frequent outside audits to maximize administrative efficiency and evaluate cost effectiveness of MCPS programs. - Systematically pilot (test-run) and rigorously evaluate all new programs and initiatives. - Make published budget more program-specific and user-friendly to facilitate review by stakeholders and increase taxpayers’ confidence that their money is being spent wisely. 	<p>“Last year each teacher had to take \$1,000 out of their pocket to help balance the budget through delayed cost-of-living increases because other fat had been wrung out, again. I have no list of wasteful spending. But I do have a sense of priorities.”(5)</p>

<p>ENRICHED AND ACCELERATED INSTRUCTION</p>	<p>No school system should discourage excellence in the pursuit of equity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Redouble efforts to expand participation by minorities through “Star Search” and similar programs. - Expand home-school services while maintaining the highly successful magnet programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “I will work to change MCPS’s systematic practice of providing more enriched and accelerated programming for students who come to school with advantages ”(2) - “MPCS must evaluate its systematic practice of providing more enriched and accelerated programming for selected groups of students identified through competitive procedures.”(2) <p>From published statements of the Montgomery County Education Forum (MCEF), co-founded and co-chaired (until spring 2004) by Valerie Ervin:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Selective programs such as [centers for the highly gifted] serve to re-segregate the public schools, leaving Black and Latino students without the education to which they are entitled, or, as one Blair parent put it, in the ‘general prison population.’”(3) - [Recommendation] “Eliminate ‘GT’ designation.”(3)
<p>SPECIAL EDUCATION</p>	<p>MCPS must foster a culture of genuine respect.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Abandon adversarial approach. - Offer the full continuum of services, including partnerships with non-public facilities and with other counties - Improve the availability of mid-level vocational programs and supports of students with behavioral issues - Give primary discretion for placement to the parents. 	<p>“The issue of African American and Latino male students being incarcerated in special education programs is and has been a serious concern of mine.”(2)</p>
<p>INSTRUCTIONAL TIME</p>	<p>Maximize the time qualified teachers spend in the classroom actually teaching.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do a careful review of MCPS training programs to eliminate those that are redundant, outdated, or simply a waste of time, and consolidate training at the beginning and end of students’ summer vacation. - Eliminate redundant testing. - Make more creative use of retired professionals to increase the pool of substitute teachers and ensure that each class has an instructor qualified in that content area instead of a babysitter. 	<p>“Generally schools have in place policies that provide for teachers to prepare appropriate materials for substitutes to use when teachers are absent. There are, of course, times when these mechanisms fall down. . . . This is unfortunate. If you see this as a pattern at your child’s school, I would recommend approaching the principal; . . . As a last resort call your Board of Education representative.”(5)</p>
<p>PTA</p>	<p>More than 20 years experience:</p>	<p>Co-President, Montgomery Blair High School PTSA</p>

<p>EXPERIENCE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maryland PTA Family of the Year 2001 - Vice-President for Administration, MCCPTA - Area Vice-President, MCCPTA - Corresponding Secretary, MCCPTA - Member, Ad Hoc Committee on the Math Audit, Curriculum Committee, MCCPTA - MCCPTA Delegate, Montgomery Blair High School - Einstein Cluster Coordinator - Vice-President, Einstein High School PTSA - President, Oakland Terrace Elementary School PTA 	
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*Statements in the Valerie Ervin column are quoted verbatim from the Valerie Ervin for BOE website (<http://www.valerie4boe.org/Position.html>) unless otherwise noted.

OTHER SOURCES:

1. Montgomery Gazette, February 20, 2004.
2. NAACP Parents' Council BOE Candidates Forum (February 4, 2004) questionnaire.
3. Montgomery County Education Forum "Preliminary Report," February 2002.
4. MCEF flier, March 2004.
5. MCCPTA BOE Candidates Forum (February 24, 2004) questionnaire.
6. Potomac Almanac, October 22, 2004

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