

School official calls for new gifted test

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by Sean R. Sedam

Staff Writer

The school system needs to change the way it identifies gifted and talented students, a top school official says.

“Short term, we need to come up with something different for this year,” Deputy Superintendent Frieda K. Lacey said. “Long term, we need to revamp this whole global screening and just do something completely different. InView didn’t get the desired results.”

InView, or the CTB/McGraw-Hill InView test, is one of two tools the school system uses as part of its process for screening second-graders for gifted and talented programs. Montgomery County Public Schools used it for the first time in March.

Parent groups are calling for an end to that process after an [MCPS report](#) last month revealed that efforts to increase the number of African-American and Hispanic students identified as gifted and talented have been unsuccessful.

Parents from African American Parents of Montgomery County, the Montgomery County Education Forum and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People held a news conference before Monday night’s school board meeting in Rockville.

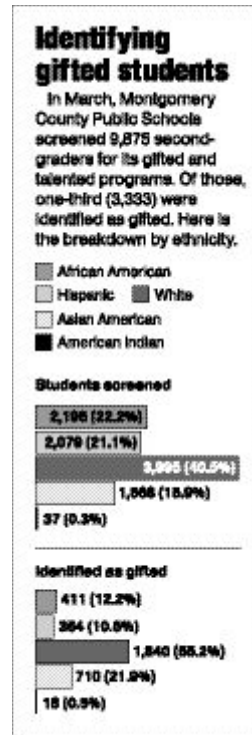
AAPMC coordinator Carla Lambert asked that the board “take a strong stance on this issue and that you demand not only a complete internal investigation into the entire Gifted/Talented program, but also outside intervention, perhaps similar to the ongoing middle school audit.”

The InView test did not capture the number of African-American or Hispanic students school administrators hoped it would, Lacey said in an interview.

She stopped short of saying the school system would do away with the test.

“We usually get stakeholder input first,” Lacey said. “... I would predict that we will not use InView. It’s something I cannot support.”

The Department of Shared Accountability will identify third-graders who are performing above grade level, performed well on last school year’s Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills or are doing work that rises above the standards, Lacey said.



Source: Montgomery County Public Schools
Reuben Duke/The Gazette

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The department will forward the names of those students to their schools with the expectation that the students will be placed in more challenging programs.

“It doesn’t matter that they are G/T or not G/T,” Lacey said.

The definition of gifted and talented ranges widely around the country, from students with high IQs to students who demonstrate abilities that might not be measured by an IQ test. Maryland code defines gifted students as those with “outstanding” intellectual capabilities, academic abilities or abilities in the creative, visual or performing arts.

The state Department of Education estimates that about 5 percent of Maryland students will be designated as gifted, a percentage that educators say is close to the national average.

But in Montgomery County, of the second-graders screened in March, 33.8 percent — or 3,333 — students were identified as gifted, down from 44.5 percent last year.

Outside consultants have said the school system is “overidentifying” gifted students, said Marty M. Creel, who oversees gifted and talented education for the school system.

With such a large number of students, “It really does make you wonder what’s actually being identified,” said Ines Cifuentes, president of the board of Casa of Maryland in Takoma Park and secretary of the Silver Spring International Middle School PTA.

Cifuentes has been a part of talks Lacey and other top administrators have had in recent weeks with representatives of AAPMC, MCEF and the NAACP Parents’ Council.

The under-representation of African Americans and Hispanics shows that there are two separate school systems in the county, she said.

“There’s a program for the vast majority of white and Asian kids and then a different program for African-American and Hispanic kids,” Cifuentes said.

Last week, Superintendent Jerry D. Weast said that of the county fifth-graders taking Math A this year — a sixth-grade math course — 42 percent have not been identified as gifted.

“So screening makes no difference” in offering challenging courses to students, Weast said.

“Obviously, that sorting mechanism, if I’ve got 42 percent already in the [more challenging] courses, we didn’t pay as much attention to it limiting the expectations,” he said.

That remark led some parents to ask whether identifying children as gifted is beneficial or necessary.

Weast insisted that there is a need for accelerated courses, but at the same time, schools need to provide academic support for students who lag behind.

“It shouldn’t be either/or, it should be both/and, but at a higher level for both of them,” he said.

Many parents would rather not have labels bandied about, Cifuentes said.

“However, there are a lot of parents who would like their children to be identified as gifted and talented,” she said.

The bottom line, parents and administrators agreed, is to provide opportunities for all students to be challenged in the classroom and to look beyond labels.

“I think we are hung up on it in Montgomery County,” Cifuentes said.

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