

TESTIMONY OF ANNA BENFIELD 1/11/11

My name is Anna Benfield and I am here as a Montgomery County Public School graduate to ask you to discontinue the use of the Gifted and Talented label.

My personal experience with MCPS was saturated with affirmation. From a young age I was told I was smart and capable and I lived into every one of those expectations with flying colors. My confidence carried me through the Rolling Terrace Spanish Immersion, through Eastern's Magnet, through the Communications Arts Program at Blair.

I have experienced the power of living up to expectations.

Yesterday, I asked my 10-year-old neighbor what he thought about Gifted and Talented. He replied, "Oh that? It just makes some kids feel bad." In schools across the county, eight and nine-year-olds have been told that they are either "gifted" and full of potential, or by implication, they are sub-par, they are nothing exceptional.

At this young age, many students begin to internalize the idea that school is not a place where they can succeed. Instead of trying to prove the system wrong, kids disengage. In a sense, they're just proving the school system right. They are told they are without gifts and without talents, so they under-perform, they put their energies elsewhere. They fulfill their prophesied failure.

I am thrilled that today you are discussing literacy, and what it means to build on early successes. If this is truly our goal, we cannot afford to handicap 60 percent of students, disproportionately black and Latino, with the mark of being less worthy, less capable than their peers. The cost of enabling failure is too high. Setting high expectations for EVERY student must be a priority.

I am here to urge you to stop the profoundly damaging practice of labeling our second graders. They are listening.