

TESTIMONY OF GEORGE VLASITS, REPRESENTING MCEA 12/7/10

Good Morning. My name is George Vlasits and I am here today as a representative of MCEA and as the chair of its Human and Civil Rights Committee.

In the statement of Core Values in the Call to Action MCPS emphasizes its commitment to equity as an integral part of its pursuit of excellence. I quote: “MCPS has high expectations for all students, believing that all children can learn at high levels.”

If we truly believe this statement and others which appear throughout the Call to Action, then the labeling of roughly 40 % of our students in second grade as Gifted and Talented, and 60%, by implication, as “NOT Gifted and Talented” needs to be eliminated. This practice is inconsistent with the pursuit of excellence and equity. It sends a message that the students themselves, their parents, and, I’m sorry to add, their teachers read loud and clear – lower your expectations for the NOT Gifted and Talented. As educators we know that expectations are critical to learning. Is it any wonder then, that by the time these students reach high school, we see a huge achievement gap?

The achievement gap is not solely a product of lowering expectations. But, I think we need to take a lesson from a sister profession – medicine. “First, do no harm!” MCPS’s labeling of students is harmful; it separates them into two groups, often by race and ethnicity, and applies different expectations to those two groups. And the question is “WHY”? How does this labeling contribute to the pursuit of excellence and equity?

There is strong evidence that it doesn’t. In fact there are two elementary schools in MCPS, Burning Tree and Georgian Forest, that stopped labeling students several years ago. And, according to administrators, teachers and parents at both school there has been NO negative impact from the elimination of the GT label.

Yet we continue a practice, which in its very nature contradicts our values and our vision. A practice that could be eliminated very easily, as it has been at Burning Tree and Georgian Forest. The MCEA urges the Board to make this change to bring our practice in line with what we believe. Thank you.