

Testimony of Michelle Gluck, Chair, MCCPTA Gifted Child Subcommittee, to the Board of Education about GT Identification

Good evening. My name is Michelle Gluck, and I am the chair of MCCPTA's Gifted Child Subcommittee.

I am sure you will read the MCCPTA letter and the GTA Challenge Every Child petition in opposition to the No Labels initiative and in support of flexible ability grouping. I'd like to briefly highlight just four points:

First, all children are not the same. All children can and should aim high, but a single standard of rigor will always be too high for some and not high enough for others, and that single standard **will limit** the children it doesn't fit.

Second, the gifted label is a tool, not a judgment. All children have gifts, just as all children are special; but GT children have abnormal learning abilities, and they will wither in the single standard classroom from boredom and frustration. In any large system, including MCPS, goals and needs that are not identified and measured will not be met. That is why GT identification is required by state law.

Third, some gifted students arrive in MCPS already functioning years above grade level. They are easy to spot. Others arrive with equal potential but fewer opportunities to develop their gifts outside of school. They are harder to identify. And those are the children who will suffer the most if we pretend that gifted children don't exist. A school that holds all children to the same expectations is one that isn't looking for hidden potential.

And finally: I see many parents have turned out tonight to urge you to preserve the elementary instrumental music program. They know that without a chance to learn foundational skills, students can't benefit from access to advanced music later on.

Would any middle or high school music student flourish in a single band class open to all levels of musicians? The beginners could "access" the advanced music, but they wouldn't have the foundational skills to learn to play it. The advanced musicians won't learn anything if they have to play music suitable to the beginners. If the band director spends half the time on one level and half on the other, all of the students waste half of their class time. And if the director teaches both levels to play simultaneously, the result is cacophony and no one learns.

Differentiated instruction in academic subjects is fundamentally no different. It would be wonderful if mixing students of all ability levels raised the achievement level of everyone by giving all students "access" to advanced work. But unfortunately, it doesn't work this way in MCPS. Despite the best of intentions, in mixed ability instruction all students are taught at the middle and no one gets "access" to the advanced work, including the high-ability students.

Thank you for your attention to the broad spectrum of parents who urge you to preserve the gifted label and challenge every child.