

TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL L. SUBIN: APRIL 8, 2024

President Friedson, Vice-President Stewart, Members of the Council:

Good evening.

My name is Michael Subin and I am here tonight to address you regarding my perceived needs for early childhood education.

My request to you is for an *aggressive* program of Early Childhood Education, the elements of which would include: early childhood education; pre-K education; supplements to Head Start; and the resurrection of an earlier 2000s program entitled Fast Start, the County equivalent of Head Start.

Lately, much emphasis has legitimately been placed on 3rd Grade Reading Proficiency. As you are aware, the latest data show that, overall, third grade reading proficiency is down for all students, while black and brown students are below those scores for white and Asian students. Lately, much emphasis has also legitimately been placed on Kindergarten Readiness Assessments, which demonstrate that same reality and predate those for 3rd Grade proficiencies.

However, to begin placing an emphasis on those two levels of proficiency is to ignore the reality of a child's pre-kindergarten background. It is to ignore the reality of a 2002 Economic Policy Institute Study entitled Inequality at the Starting Gate: Social Background in Achievement as Children Begin School. It is, in fact, the point where the Education Gap begins, continues to grow, and determines success in school.

As we all know, success in school determines success as adults, whether and where one goes to college, what professions one goes in and the wages they are paid.

The Study examined differences by race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status (SES) and came to the following conclusions:

- Average math achievement was significantly lower for blacks and Hispanics;

- 34% of black and 29% of Hispanic children were in the lowest quintile of SES compared with only 9% of white children and that “*children at different SES groups achieve at different levels*; and,
- Family structure has an important association with SES.

One may be inclined to discount those numbers and conclusions as reflecting one study at one point in time. However, while the exact numbers may vary somewhat, they reflect the exact same numbers and conclusions resulting from the exact same study undertaken in Montgomery County at the same time. The County study included other issues, such as ESOL and FARMs, which narrowed the impact of SES, but didn’t change the bottom line. That study resulted in a significant infusion of funds to those communities and schools to narrow the education gap in those areas reflecting the greatest need. The programs included Early Childhood Education and Pre-K programs. The longitudinal studies of those youngsters in the targeted areas, as they matriculated through the system, showed significant gains in closing the educational gap.

As one examines the location of those schools located in the Institute’s SES in the area of the Institute’s study, in Montgomery County, while those percentages may change, the relative numbers would reflect the same racial and diversity issues. One could then conclude that the patterns of SES impute a Civil Rights violation equating to Disparate Impact in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and segregation. While I do not claim that either jurisdiction is guilty of governmental action, I do feel that it creates a moral responsibility to address that “Inequality at the Start Gate.” Were those numbers the result of a claim of Disparate Impact in any institution or private concern, one would have a *prima facie* claim of discrimination which may or may not survive scrutiny.

How can MCPS mitigate the impact? Eisenberg v. Montgomery County taught us, once and for all, that race cannot be a factor in addressing the problem. However, by using the SES data, MCPS could take the test scores at the impacted schools and institute those suggestions made by Byron Johns and Diego Uriburu.

How then is all of that related to those issues regarding 3rd Grade Reading Proficiency?

- 2022-2023 Kindergarten readiness results for Montgomery County released by Maryland's Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System showed: Black/African American readiness at 38%; Hispanic at 23%; Asian at 59%; and, White at 68%; and
- Fall, 2023 MCPS K-2 Benchmark Data showing increases in the percentages of black and brown students reading at or above benchmark levels, it also showed that 88.5% of Black or African-American students and 65.8% of Hispanic/Latino students were still below reading benchmarks, while 31.3% of white students and 22.6% of Asian students were below the benchmarks.

Clearly, the problems do not suddenly begin in 3rd grade and need to be addressed earlier, not just at the starting gate, but earlier in the lives of those youngsters.

I commend Johns and Uribura for suggesting several in-school measures to increase reading proficiencies, but do not believe that is enough. Those measures still do not address starting gate issues and magnify the extent of the measures needed to close the education gap. What is needed is a coupling of the Johns/Uribura program and several early childhood/Pre-K programs to address the Starting Gate and 3rd grade education gaps.

Those additional programs should include, but not be limited to:

- Head Start: Head Start is a federally funded program whose monies are passed through from the state. The funding goes to the Community Action Agency and MCPS serves as its agent in providing the program. It struggles to fully enroll the County's half-day program because most families need full-day childcare and current funding is insufficient to provide for an adequate number of full-day slots. The question would be whether that funding would come from the County or MCPS. Additional County funding to MCPS would add to Maintenance of Effort or MCPS would have to

divert funds from other categories. Direct County supplements, or grants to MCPS, Head Start would appear to be the best solution both to add to the full-day slots and to create additional slots.

- **Fast Start:** Fast Start is a program that was proposed, but never implemented, as part of the package of early childhood education programs designed to prepare youngsters for kindergarten readiness. It was to be modeled on Head Start but not to be implemented through MCPS. The idea was to provide the same level of service as Head Start, but by County non-profits. Staff qualifications and programmatic standards were to mirror those of Head Start. The services to be provided were to be the same as Head Start. The benefit of implementing Fast Start is it would avoid the financial and other program issues facing MCPS and full-day funding of Head Start. It is likely that Fast Start costs would be significantly less than those of Head Start and serve a significant number of additional children. That is not to suggest that full-day funding of Head Start should not be considered.
- **Early Childhood Education and Pre-K Programs:** Curriculum based programs implemented through County non-profits and funded by the County. That curriculum, developed in conjunction with MCPS, could include things such as language, color differentiation, numbers, letters, words, and word associations culminating in basic reading.

To summarize, we have a recognized problem that has been most manifested in 3rd grade reading scores. The issue then is how to best address the problem, which reflects clear racial differences, is to address the inequality at the starting gate. But to effectively do that, Montgomery County government and MCPS must collaborate to offer sufficient early childhood programs. MCPS must concede that they have a critical role to play, and County government must be willing to fund and help implement those programs. Failing that, the system, as a whole, must accept responsibility for perpetuating starting gate inequality.

Thank you.