

Special Education Committee Report

October 2009

Chair: Jeanne Taylor

During the month of September I received a total of 5 phone calls and e-mails requesting help & information relating to special education in MCPS. Two parents needed assistance in regard to services for their children and three others inquired about serving as Special Education committee chairs for their school PTAs.

On September 13, as MCCPTA Special Education Committee Chair, I participated in the All Kids Count ceremony honoring the late Blair Ewing. I was asked to step in for Kate Walsh, MD State Board of Education member, who was slated to speak but unable to attend the ceremony. I read her tribute to Blair Ewing, which can be found at the bottom of this report. At the upcoming Board of Directors meeting I will be presenting a plaque to Kay Romero and the MCCPTA Board that promotes the legacy of Blair Ewing. Blair was a champion for all children, particularly those with special needs.

The Down Syndrome Network of Montgomery County invited me to attend their 5th Annual Buddy Walk on Saturday, October 10 at Hadley Park. I am very honored by the invitation and plan to attend.

Janice Edwing, Special Education Chair for Darnestown ES, continues to represent our committee on the Grading and Reporting Implementation Team (GRIT). Their meeting schedule may also be found at the end of this report.

Our Kick Off meeting for the 2009-2010 school year is on Monday, October 5 in the Carver auditorium. Gwen Mason and Judy Pattik, Directors of Special Education in MCPS, will introduce themselves. Other advocacy groups will be presenting information about their organizations.

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Remarks from Kate Walsh for Blair Ewing tribute:

Please accept my apologies for my absence today. It is such a tribute to Blair that you all would gather like this to honor his memory.

I only knew Blair for a short time in the year we served together on the Maryland Board. However, we clicked from the first time we met, both of us being long time warriors for education reform. He was no reluctant warrior. Even when Blair was in hospice and dying, he was still engaged in the fight, determined not to let our all too brief tenure on the Board go to waste.

Of all the Board members, Blair was our most devoted student, spending more time than any of us studying the issues to be taken up, all because he recognized that a decision that might have seemed benign while being deliberated in the Board chambers could and often did end up having a serious and harmful impact on the children we are appointed to serve. At no time was this more apparent than when the Board revisited its decision about

the HSAs because of its impact on special education students. Blair knew that the special education community wasn't just whining, that parents who had struggled for years to ensure their children succeeded were facing one obstacle too many. Creating a viable option for these children to get their diplomas was the right thing to do and it was Blair's doing.

Blair also had a keen understanding of the politics of the Board, having served so many years on the Montgomery County School Board. As someone who does not possess such an understanding, I often feel his loss in a very practical way. I'm not so confident about navigating this tricky business, and find myself muttering, "now what would Blair tell me to do?"

When wonderful souls leave this Earth, we are all the less for their absence. Our sorrow over Blair's departure is not just about our regret over the contributions he would have otherwise made, however great they surely would have been. We also feel the absence of his person, his essence if you will. Yes, life has indeed gone on since Blair's death, but life is not the same for those of us privileged enough to have crossed paths--whether for a few months or for many years--with someone as good as Blair Ewing.

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GRIT Meeting Dates 2009–2010

September 30, 2009	Focus: All Grade Levels
October 28, 2009	Focus: Elementary
November 18, 2009	Focus: Secondary
January 21, 2010	Focus: Elementary
February 24, 2010	Focus: Secondary
April 28, 2010	Focus: All