

HHS COMMITTEE #1
March 8, 2012

MEMORANDUM

March 6, 2012

TO: Health and Human Services Committee

FROM: Linda McMillan, Senior Legislative Analyst *Linda McMillan*

SUBJECT: **Walt Whitman High School Exceptional Speakers Program**

Six Walt Whitman High School Students who are participating in the Exceptional Speakers Bureau will present to the Health and Human Services Committee.

The Exceptional Speakers are students with disabilities who are using public speaking as a way to help raise disability awareness. The program also encourages self advocacy. The students will speak to the Committee about the challenges they face in life and learning and how they are overcoming these challenges and achieving in school. The students are responsible for writing their own speeches.

The Exceptional Speakers Bureau recently spoke at the ARC of Montgomery County.

Attached at © 1 is an MCPS Bulletin on this pilot program. The program's coach is Ms. Lynn Chvotkin, a Walt Whitman speech pathologist.



Whitman Students Deliver Speeches on Overcoming Disabilities

4/5/2011

A pilot program at Walt Whitman High School has a group of students speaking up about their disabilities and how they've worked to overcome them.

This year, the school launched the Montgomery Exceptional Speakers Bureau, which has 19 student members. All of the students have physical, developmental, cognitive, speech/language or hearing disabilities. Four of the students—Geoffrey Mikol Caldwell, Katie Guarino, Andreina Avila and Dylan Kuhnenn—volunteered to write and give speeches about the challenges of their disability and how they've worked to overcome them. It was their first time doing any sort of public speaking. Last week, they rehearsed in front of an audience of their peers and Whitman faculty.

And then they took their show on the road, giving their speeches to an outside audience during a meeting at the ARC of Montgomery County. They spoke of their reading comprehension troubles, difficulty with vocabulary words and using testing accommodations. But mostly, they spoke of knowing that success would come with hard work. They also said that they hoped others would be inspired by hearing their stories.

Speech pathologist Lynn Chvotkin coaches the students, making them aware of things like body language and teaching them how to deal with things like constructive criticism.

"They are the trailblazers," she says. "Academically, they are expected to make these kinds of speeches, so this can give them a leg up and help them prepare. Emotionally, this increases their self-advocacy and self-esteem."

Chvotkin says the program received tremendous support from Whitman special education resource teacher Diane Long, Principal Alan Goodwin and Gwen Mason, the director of special education services for MCPS. She would love to see the program implemented in all high schools with a countywide coordinator.