



Commission on Children and Youth 2012-2013 Annual Report

Montgomery County, Maryland
Department of Health and Human Services





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A Letter From the Chair



October 1, 2013

The Honorable Isiah Leggett
Montgomery County Executive

The Honorable Christopher S. Barclay
President, Montgomery County Board of Education

The Honorable Nancy Navarro
President, Montgomery County Council

Uma Ahluwalia, Director
Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services

Montgomery County Citizens

Dear Mr. Leggett, Ms. Navarro, Mr. Barclay, Ms. Ahluwalia and Citizens of Montgomery County,

In 2012-2013, the Commission focused on promoting healthy lifestyles with a focus on the mind, body and community. The Community Support for Youth subcommittee embarked on a joint effort with the Collaboration Council for Children, Youth and Families to survey youth-serving organizations to assess needs and barriers to capacity building. The Physical Health subcommittee conducted extensive research into best practices for increasing the physical fitness of youth. The Social and Emotional Health subcommittee followed the Superintendent's efforts to operationalize his focus on social and emotional health.

The Commission advocated strongly for continued support for the County's critical youth-serving programs. We met with members of the County Council, Board of Education, Collaboration Council, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) senior leadership, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) staff, as well as other leaders in the County. Specifically, the Commission had an opportunity to have a productive exchange with Council President Nancy Navarro, HHS Director Uma Ahluwalia and Chief of Children, Youth and Family Services Kate Garvey. The public officials shared the type of information needed from citizen advisory boards and commissions to make intelligent, thoughtful funding decisions and, in return, the Commission shared its priorities and recommendations.

Additionally, we continued to highlight the promotion of resource awareness among youth in our community. For the second consecutive year, we collaborated with the Interagency Coalition on Adolescent Pregnancy (ICAP) to distribute 45,000 Teen Help Cards to MCPS high school students. In addition, we wrote to every MCPS high school newspaper sponsor to highlight the distribution of the teen cards and make them available electronically to students via online student newspapers.



A Letter From the Chair

The Commission was gratified to see a long standing priority bear fruit this year when MCPS enabled teachers to hold more open discussions about sexual orientation in health classes. In 2011-12, we partnered with PFLAG and The Rainbow Coalition to encourage MCPS to make these changes.

Of particular note was the success of our two annual events: the 6th *Youth Having A Voice Roundtable* and the 27th Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards. Held in December, the Roundtable received positive internal and external feedback. It was envisioned by Commission members in 2008 as a forum to hear directly from youth-serving agencies and the children and youth participating in their programs. We also see it as a model environment in which community stakeholders ‘listen’ to the County’s young people to better understand and address their psychosocial and educational needs. This year, the focus was on the connection between physical health and social emotional health. We were fortunate to have youth from Excel Beyond the Bell, Futurebound Independent Living Program, Gateway to College, Greentree Adolescent Program, Identity, Montgomery County Recreation Department Student/Teen Employment Program, and the YMCA Youth & Family Services Man to Man Program, participate. Students expressed their strong desire to stay fit and healthy; to build a relationship with their school counselor; and to have access to healthy food.

Once again, the Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards acknowledged members of the community who have gone above and beyond the call of duty to help and guide our young people. The Commission received an unprecedented number of qualified entries and it was heartening to hear how many unsung heroes live in our community.

Finally, the Commission leveraged County resources by finding several private partners to sponsor our programs. We are grateful to NOVA Research, Nourish Now, Adventure Theatre MTC, United Therapeutics, Avitecture, Inc., and The Gazette for their support.

The Commission is committed to its mission and appreciates your support in our efforts. We look forward to working with you again this year. Please feel free to contact the Commission to inform us about how we may best support your efforts and partner to benefit the County’s children and youth.

Sincerely,

Chair



The Commission on Children and Youth

Mission

The Commission on Children and Youth promotes the well-being of Montgomery County’s children, youth and families so that all young people may realize their full potential and become contributing, productive adults.

The Commission advances its mission by: (1) identifying the needs of young people and their families, and the groups and agencies that serve them; (2) informing and advising the County Executive, the County Council, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Board of Education (BOE) and the community at large; (3) recommending policies, programs, funding and legislative priorities; and (4) affirming the needs, aspirations and achievements of all the County’s young people.

Structure

The scope of issues and priorities the Commission can address is broad and wide-reaching. In order to focus its work, the Commission holds an annual strategic planning retreat every June and selects priority issues for the year. Subcommittees are formed around the selected priorities.

In 2012-2013, the Commission elected to promote healthy lifestyles with a focus on the mind, body and community. It formed three subcommittees with distinct goals and action items:

- Community Support for Youth – Develop a survey to be distributed to various youth-serving professionals (both administrative and front-line) for the purpose of assessing and identifying the most common, important, and supportable needs of youth serving organizations throughout the County.
- Physical Health –Make research-based recommendations to the County government and Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) about increasing the physical fitness of youth.
- Social and Emotional Health –Monitor how MCPS and Superintendent Joshua Starr intend to operationalize their focus on social and emotional health. Raise awareness about social and emotional wellness among County middle students by designing and implementing an “Are You A 10?” Stress Scale Poster Contest.

The Commission hosts two major community events each year: the Youth Having a Voice Roundtable, which allows the Commission, public officials and the larger community to hear the message of Montgomery County youth, and the Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards, which honors individuals and organizations that provide extraordinary service to the children and youth of our community.

Meetings

The Commission meets on the second Wednesday of the month from 6:00 PM – 9:00 PM. Meetings are generally held in the 1st Floor Conference Rooms at 401 Hungerford Drive, Rockville. The Commission breaks into standing subcommittees at approximately 6:45 PM and reconvenes at 7:45 PM. Meetings are open to the public.



Membership: Commission Year 2012—2013

The Commission has 27 members including one representative from the public school system; one representative from the private schools in the County; one representative from the Department of Recreation; and two representatives from HHS. The remaining 22 members are equally divided among individuals with recent experience in agencies providing services to children and youth; youth and young adults; and parents. **The Commission on Children and Youth is the only board, committee or commission within HHS with youth members.**

Youth Representatives

Toure' Burgess, James Hubert Blake High School Elizabeth Lakew, Montgomery Blair High School
Noelle Dayal, The Holton-Arms School Jessica Maxin, Thomas Wootton High School
Alexander DiMisa, Gonzaga College High School Jennifer Weinstein, McLean School of Maryland
Sarah Goldberg, Sidwell Friends School

Parent Representatives

David Anderson Vicki Stearn
Jane de Winter Stephanie Williams
Stuart Grossman Don Wynne
Lindsay Hoffman

Private Agency Representatives

Shari Argue, Lourie Center Early Head Start
Dana Bell, Phillips School — Laurel
Carson Henry, YMCA Youth & Family Services
Nancy Kaplan, Private Nursery School Community
Alies Muskin, Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Deatrice Williams, Infant & Toddler Connection of Alexandria/Alexandria Parent Infant Education Program

Public Agency Representatives

Melinda McCartin, HHS, Public Health Services
Tamara Nedomanski, MCPS
Elizabeth Ortega-Lohmeyer, Montgomery County Department of Recreation
Larissa Royal, HHS, Child Welfare Services



Commission Activities

- Participated in a worksession with the Health and Human Services Committee of the Montgomery County Council to discuss how the County advisory boards and commissions can further the Council's policy priorities. The Commission stated its policy priority for the year, which was the promotion of healthy lifestyles with an emphasis on mental health, physical health and community support for youth. (October 11, 2012)
- Provided testimony in support of funding for programs that promote healthy lifestyles at the HHS Community Budget Forum. (October 15, 2012)
- Attended Superintendent Joshua P. Starr's first State of the Schools address at the Music Center at Strathmore. (November 12, 2012)
- Dr. Raymond Crowel, Chief, Behavioral Health and Crisis Services, HHS, met with the Commission's Social and Emotional Health Committee and discussed prevention, intervention and gaps in mental health services. (November 14, 2012)
- For the second consecutive year, partnered with the Interagency Coalition on Adolescent Pregnancy to print and distribute 45,000 Teen Help Cards to MCPS high school students. (Fall 2012)
- Hosted the 6th Annual *Youth Having a Voice Roundtable*, which allowed 50 middle and high school youth representing various programs throughout Montgomery County to frankly discuss topics ranging from social and emotional health to cafeteria food. Please see **page 8** for a summary of this event. (December 5, 2012)
- Carol Walsh, Executive Director, Collaboration Council for Children, Youth and Families, met with the Community Support for Youth Committee to discuss the development of a survey to assess the needs of out-of-school time providers. (December 12, 2012)
- Donated \$190 in gift cards to Child Welfare Services to provide holiday gifts to its teen population. (December 12, 2012)
- Facilitated an informative discussion with Dr. Ursula Hermann, Director, Department of Student Services, MCPS, about the social and emotional needs of students, the students' perception of counselors and their role in schools, Coordinated Student Services Teams, stress faced by students and collaborations between MCPS and community youth-serving agencies. (January 9, 2013)



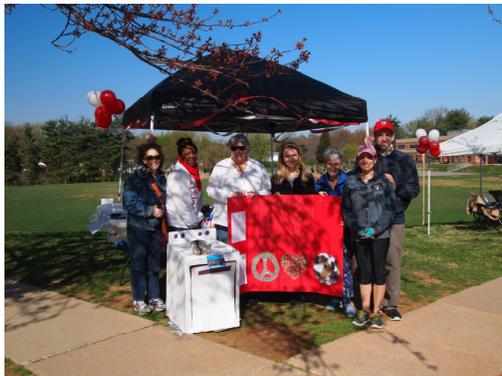
Youth Commissioner Alex DiMisa gives oral testimony at the HHS Community Budget Forum.



Commission Activities

Continued...

- Allyssa J. Allen and Jessica Hoehn of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, met with the Commission's Physical Health Committee to discuss strategies to prevent and decrease obesity in youth. (January 9, 2013)
- Presented testimony to the Board of Education (BOE) on FY14 budget priorities for MCPS, which encouraged the BOE to focus on improving and expanding social and emotional support for students. (January 17, 2013)
- Hosted Thomas Grazio, LCSW-C, Director, Tree House Child Assessment Center, who provided the Commission with information about the Tree House and the 1st Annual Tour de Cookie, a non-competitive family friendly bike race benefitting child victims of abuse. (February 13, 2013)
- Facilitated an in-depth discussion with Nancy Navarro, President, Montgomery County Council, Uma Ahluwalia, Director, HHS, and Kate Garvey, Chief, Children, Youth and Family Services, HHS on the December 2012 Youth Having a Voice Roundtable, prioritizing children and youth in the FY14 operating budget and beyond, out-of-school time programs and factors that influence funding decisions, potential for mental health services for youth in informal settings, school resources officers and Alternative Response, which is the State's new policy for handling low risk reports of child abuse and neglect. (February 13, 2013)
- Transmitted a letter to all high school newspaper sponsors asking them to help spread the word about the Teen Help Cards and the community resources the cards promote. Provided them with PDF files with the cards in English and Spanish and a Quick Response Code that links to the card to post online. (February 20, 2013)
- Participated in the County Executive's annual meeting with Boards, Committees, and Commissions. (February 23, 2012)



Commissioners stand before their "We're on Fire!" themed cookie stand at the 1st Annual Tour de Cookie.

- Jane de Winter, Chair, met with Christopher Barclay, President, BOE, and discussed SB 691 – Education – Due Process Hearings for Children with Disabilities – Burden of Proof, the role of school counselors, the Tour de Cookie, the Commission's plans for a poster contest to raise awareness about mental well-being, and Dr. Ursula Hermann's proposal to implement Coordinated Student Services Teams in MCPS. (February 27, 2013)
- Jane de Winter and Mary Gies appeared on Fox Morning News to promote the Tree House Child Assessment Center's 1st Annual Tour de Cookie. (April 8, 2013)
- Participated in the Tour de Cookie by hosting a cookie stand and riding in the event. (April 14, 2013)



Commission Activities

Continued...

- Hosted the 27th Annual Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards, which recognize individuals, organizations, and businesses whose dedication, vision and service to children and youth have made a difference in the lives of others. Please see **page 11** for additional information on this uplifting event. (May 6, 2013)
- Developed an “Are You A 10?” Stress Scale Poster Contest to help raise awareness about social and emotional wellness among Montgomery County middle school students. The poster contest will be administered in collaboration with School Health Services. Secured an iPad mini from United Therapeutics Corporation and Avitecture, Inc. to offer as a grand prize and other smaller donations to award for honorary mentions. (Spring 2013)
- Wrote a letter to the County Executive, County Council, BOE and Superintendent of Schools asking for improvement in the availability and access to both structured and recreational activities for children and teenagers in grades K-12. Please see **page 12** for the full text. (May 17, 2013)
- Developed a survey to be distributed to various youth-serving professionals, both administrative and direct service, for the purpose of assessing and identifying the most common, important, and supportable needs of youth serving organizations throughout the County. Partnered with the Collaboration Council for Children, Youth and Families to distribute the survey. (May 21, 2013)
- Submitted a letter of thanks to the County Executive and County Council for their continued commitment to our community’s young people, which they demonstrated in the FY14 operating budget. (June 14, 2013)
- Participated in Boards, Committees and Commissions Quarterly Leadership Meetings with Uma Ahluwalia, Director, HHS.



County Executive Isiah Leggett honors departing youth Commissioners Alex DiMisa and Sarah Goldberg at the 27th Annual Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards Ceremony.



Youth Having a Voice Roundtable

The Commission hosted its 6th annual *Youth Having a Voice Roundtable* on December 5, 2012 at the Upper County Community Recreation Center. Approximately 50 middle and high school youth representing Excel Beyond the Bell, Futurebound Independent Living Program, Gateway to College, Greentree Adolescent Program, Identity, Montgomery County Recreation Department Student/Teen Employment Program, and the YMCA Youth & Family Services Man to Man Program, joined us to discuss topics ranging from social and emotional health to cafeteria food.

Many themes emerged from this lively discussion. First, and foremost, Montgomery County should be proud of its offerings to children and youth. The young people had overwhelmingly positive things to say about the many programs in which they are involved and the staff members that mentor and support them. The teens told us that these programs make them feel safe, teach them responsibility, give them opportunities to have fun and be with friends, and help them lead healthy lives. Specific student comments include:

- I work four days a week through the STEP program. It teaches me responsibility and lets me be with my friends.
- I work in the weight room with the Sports Academies. I teach kids healthy lifestyles. It keeps them safe, it keeps our students active.
- Physical activity {through the Sports Academies} gives kids something to do. It lets us release emotions and spend time with friends.
- I feel very safe at school.
- I feel safe at school because of security and sign-in. {Staff} talks to us, helps solve our problems. Administrators are always there, always following you around.

This reiterates the need to **continually invest in a variety of out of school time programs**, including academic, art, athletic and youth employment programs, and also **aggressively promote existing activities and services** so all students are able to reap the benefits of living in Montgomery County.

The students touched on social and emotional health, what it means to them and resources they have to address their needs. There was almost unanimous agreement that teens today face many stressors and almost equal agreement that school counselors are not generally perceived as a resource for social and emotional support, many times due to their significant administrative duties such as class scheduling. The Commission received a resounding "NO" when it asked if students felt they had a bond with their counselors. Some specific comments included:

- "There's no making a bond with your counselor."
- "I wouldn't go to a counselor for a personal problem, only a schedule change".
- "Counselors try to tell people they are there to help but then they're never there."
- "I don't trust my counselor enough to tell her anything personal"
- "It is my senior year and my counselor has not reached out to me once."



Youth Having a Voice Roundtable

Continued...

The Commission places high value on the role of school counselors and believes they could and should play a larger role in contributing to the social and emotional health of the County's young people. As we understand it, there are two elements required for a solution to the counselor problem: first, more counselors are needed, and second, more attention needs to be given to the quality of the relationship between counselors and students.

The Commission is not naive to budget realities and understands that increasing the quantity of counselors may not happen in the coming fiscal year. But several steps to improve the quality of the relationship between counselors and students can be taken at this time. Many students reported that they were assigned to a different counselor each school year making it difficult to establish a relationship. We recommend that **students stay with the same counselor all four years of high school** so there is more of an opportunity to build a relationship. Students said:

- "I've had the same counselor for four years and it helped to build the relationship."
- "My counselor helped me get into college and checks in on me."

The Commission also recommends that **MCPS increase outreach to students**, making them more aware that school counselors are there to provide emotional support. The Commission also advises MCPS to **streamline counselors' responsibilities** so that they are free to do more social and emotional work with their students. Finally, some students are not equipped to take the initiative to foster a relationship with a counselor. Counselors drive the relationships and they need support within the schools to accomplish this task. We recommend that administrators **determine effective methods for supporting counselors to take the initiative with students who need encouragement to reach out for help.**

Many students related that they relied on the adults in their respective afterschool programs for social and emotional support. This highlights the importance of **continuing to support out of school time providers.**

Next, the Roundtable participants talked about their efforts to succeed academically and the associated challenges, both educational and social. Many of the students expressed their desire for lunchtime tutoring that goes beyond what is currently offered through high school National Honors Societies. They specifically recommended **the use of education professionals**, or 'actual tutors'. They feel this opportunity to obtain extra help during the school day will relieve some of the stress that is associated with attending school within a world class system and help them balance their roles in life (i.e. student, child, friend, athlete, employee).

The youth talked a great deal about physical activity and physical fitness. The most significant point that the Commission took from this piece of the discussion is that these teens **WANT** to be active. They **WANT** to be fit and lead healthy lives. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to ensure that they have opportunities available to them. These bright young people had specific recommendations on how to increase their level of physical activity, which include:



Youth Having a Voice Roundtable

Continued...

- All schools offer specialty gym classes that allow students to choose the sports they play and the activities they participate in.
- Expand Sports Academy programs to lunch.
- Offer more athletic activities to students that cannot make their school sports teams.
- Make the gym available before and after school and during lunch for informal basketball or other physical activities.

The young people also raised concerns about the blatant use of substances by students during the school day and the lack of consequences from school personnel. "Teachers don't do anything. Someone comes to school smelling like weed and they don't say anything...Teachers know about the smoking and drinking and don't do anything." This conversation highlighted the lack of resources dedicated to prevention and the need for services to mitigate the loss of the federal Safe and Drug Free Schools grant.

Before the Roundtable closed, youth Commissioners asked the questions: If you could change one thing in the County, what would it be? If you were in charge, how would you spend the County's money? Food and transportation were the two main topics discussed. The students want fresh food in their cafeterias. Also, they aren't opposed to healthy options; they just want those healthy options to be appealing (e.g., the fruit to be fresh). One student stated that he needed more food; he didn't get enough to eat. It is important to remember that **we must continue to fight hunger in Montgomery County and ensure that our children have their most basic needs met.**

The youth would also like **increased access to free Ride On and Metrobus services.** The Department of Public Works and Transportation currently allows all school-age children to ride free on Ride On and Metrobus between 2:00PM and 7:00PM, Monday through Friday. The teens would like the services extended to the early morning hours and evenings. Students often miss the morning school bus due to the early hour and need alternate transportation. Afterschool activities and employment often prevent students from utilizing the afternoon buses. The ability to use public transportation free of charge during these additional hours would hopefully decrease tardiness and allow students to increase their participation in prosocial afterschool activities and employment. An expansion of this program would also give peace of mind to parents of all income levels who know that their children have a safe way to and from school home.

As you can see the discussion was lively and the young people learned from one another and made new contacts. We hope that policymakers take the lessons learned and use them to guide policies and practices to support youth in the community. Our members look forward to continuing to partner with public officials on issues related to children, youth and families.



Nancy Dworkin

Outstanding Service to Youth Awards

The Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth held its 27th Annual Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards Ceremony on Monday, May 6, 2013 at the Adventure Theatre MTC in historic Glen Echo Park. The event was co-sponsored by NOVA Research Company, Adventure Theatre MTC, Nourish Now and the Gazette.

The Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards Ceremony is designed to recognize individuals, organizations and businesses whose dedication, vision and service to children and youth have made a difference in the lives of others. There are six award categories: Business, Volunteer, Service Provider, Organization, Youth and Child Advocate. In selecting the award recipients, the Awards Committee considered the quality of service, length of time for which services were provided, number of children and youth benefiting from the service and impact to diverse communities.

This year's award winners were:

- The Washington Area New Auto Dealers Association received the Business award for offering Montgomery County youth unparalleled opportunities to reach their potential and develop technical skills for successful careers in the automotive industry.
- Dr. Hattie N. Washington, founder of Aunt Hattie's Place, received the Child Advocate award for her long-term commitment to providing a safe, stable, nurturing, and long-term home for abused, abandoned, and neglected males in foster care;
- Unity Christian Fellowship, Inc, was honored in the Organization category for promoting success among at-risk middle and high school students through an array of enriching academic, athletic, social and character building activities.
- Officer William Morrison, a 28 year veteran of the Montgomery County Department of Police, was honored in the Service Provider category for his innovation in developing creative new programs to decrease underage drinking and tireless work to educate the public on the consequences of teen drinking;
- Shari Golob was honored in the Volunteer category for her dedication and commitment as a Court Appointed Special Advocate for abused and neglected children; and,
- Courtney Dumais was honored in the Youth category for her extensive service to youth, both locally and internationally, and for inspiring others in her community to make a difference as well.

The award is named in memory of Nancy Dworkin, past Chairperson of the Commission, who died in 1987. Nancy was the director of the Center for Unique Learners, a Rockville school for children with learning disabilities. Her upbeat teaching philosophy focused on "teaching to strength" and encouraging all students to develop skills and reach their own potential. This philosophy echoes our purposes in establishing this Awards Program - encouraging us all to reach our own potential for service to others.





Letter to Public Officials Regarding Physical Activity for Children and Teenagers in Grades K-12

May 17, 2013

The Honorable Isiah Leggett
Montgomery County Executive

The Honorable Christopher Barclay
President, Montgomery County Board of Education

The Honorable Nancy Navarro
President, Montgomery County Council

Dr. Joshua Starr
Superintendent, Montgomery County Public Schools

Dear Mr. Leggett, Ms. Navarro, Mr. Barclay and Dr. Starr,

During the current term, the Commission on Children and Youth's (CCY) Physical Health Committee has compiled a great deal of research on the benefits of physical activities and fitness to youth. Through our research, which included the perspectives of the Commission's adult members and high school representatives, we have become aware of the significant lack of opportunities for physical activities available to our County's youth. **Accordingly, the CCY calls for an increased focus by the County's leadership to improve the availability and access to both structured and recreational physical activities for children and teenagers in grades K – 12.** A synopsis of our findings, including key recommendations for our county leaders and school system administrators, is provided herein.

Research shows that adequate physical activity (about 60 minutes daily) for children and adolescents improves academic performance, social and emotional well-being, behavior, and physical fitness, while reducing childhood obesity. For example, a study published by the *Association for Psychological Science* found that there is a positive correlation between exercise and teenagers' mental health and self-esteem. Unfortunately, half of our nation's youth do not engage in sufficient levels of physical activity, according to a 2011 study by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), one of the nation's largest philanthropies devoted to public health.

Data compiled by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) from over 50 studies showed the positive impact of physical activity on academic achievement (grades and test scores), as well as academic performance (cognitive skills and academic behavior). The Commission recommends that an increased focus by MCPS and private school administrators be placed on enriching school-based physical activities in four areas: **Physical Education (PE) classes** (increasing PE time and/or adding components to improve the quality of PE); **Recess** (providing access to recess where structured activities are available on a regular basis); **Classroom Physical Activities** (incorporating movement activities in classroom settings), **Extracurricular Physical Activities** (providing additional alternatives to school sports teams), and **Middle School Sports**.

Beyond the studies and the statistics, the Commission is fortunate to have the perspective of our county's youth. Seven young people are voting members of the CCY. And, every year we hold a "Youth Having a Voice Roundtable," which affords young people from around the County the opportunity to speak about issues that concern them. The message from our youth is clear. They consistently stressed that they want to be active and fit, but that they do not have regular access to the physical activities they need.



Letter to Public Officials Regarding Physical Activity for Children and Teenagers in Grades K-12 Continued...

While the youth feel that it is incumbent on County leaders to ensure opportunities are available, they offer some ideas of their own: provide more **Specialty Gym classes** (to add physical activities and programs tailored for a wider spectrum of students); expand and strengthen the **Sports Academy programs** and **gym access** (i.e. before/after school, lunch hours); and, finally, offer **alternative athletic activities** for students whose grades are too low to be eligible for their schools' official sports teams.

The youth also mentioned that lack of transportation is a barrier to participation in physical fitness programs or activities during out of school time hours. Increased access to school-sponsored activity buses and free public transportation would allow students to increase their participation in healthy afterschool activities.

Research conducted at graduate students at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, who shared their data with us, supports the obvious benefits of good nutrition and physical activities on curbing youth obesity. Key factors contributing to obesity include food insecurity (inadequate funds to buy healthy food), food deserts (decreased access to healthy food) and early school start times (causing sleep deprivation, inadequate exercise due to fatigue, and skipping breakfast). Multiple recommendations were made to the Commission, including encouraging the County to work with fitness clubs, community centers, sports leagues, faith-based sports leagues, and other organizations, to arrange for vouchers and/or reduced fees for young people who could not afford to participate on their own. Another idea suggested is the exploration of securing grants (example: Health Empowerment Zones) from entities such as RWJF for the improvement of public health through the implementation of various programs.

The CCY also recommends that an effort be made by our County government to continue building a greater awareness of the initiatives and programs that are already available, including parks, playgrounds, sports leagues, hiking/biking trails and more. Many of our youth do not take advantage of these opportunities because they don't know about them. Additional methods of distributing information should be found. Additionally, we recommend that the County use existing research to develop effective programs designed to improve physical fitness for our youth; for example, a program within RWJF (known as Active Living Research) stresses that playgrounds are vital to youth fitness.

We recognize and appreciate the tremendous effort already being made by the leadership within Montgomery County and MCPS on initiatives critical to enhancing the physical well-being of our youth. This is a snapshot of our findings. We hope you will consider our recommendations for improving the physical fitness of our County's youth as you develop and shape policies.

Sincerely,

Jane de Winter
Chair

Carson Henry
Co Vice-Chair

Don Wynne
Co Vice-Chair

cc: Uma Ahluwalia, Director, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
Kate Garvey, Chief, Children, Youth and Family Services, HHS
Janette Gilman, President, MCCPTA



Isiah Leggett, County Executive
Uma S. Ahluwalia, Director
Kate Garvey, Chief
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Language translation and alternative formats of this report are available upon request.
For additional information on the Commission, please call or write at the address and telephone numbers listed above.

Montgomery County does not discriminate on the basis of disability in employment or in the admission or access to its programs or services.

