MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

March 20, 2008

President Nancy Navarro
Board of Education
Montgomery County Public Schools
850 Hungerford Drive
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear President Navarro and Members of the Board of Education,

We are writing to you to convey our concern regarding the level of physical education currently being provided to the children in our public schools. We are aware that the Board of Education opted to oppose HB 503: The Bryan Moore Student Health and Fitness Act of Maryland which would require a minimum of ninety minutes of physical education per week at the elementary level. Your desire for local autonomy over curricular decisions is certainly understandable and the fiscal ramifications of an increase in physical education may give us all some cause for concern.

Nonetheless, the physical and emotional health of our County's youth is an issue of public policy that must rise above jurisdictional boundaries and fiscal limitation. It is just too important. In this era of rising obesity rates, rising rates of type II diabetes, and growing attention issues among our youth, we cannot afford to stay on the trajectory we currently find ourselves. We must work together and recommit ourselves to the physical and mental well-being of our children by including more opportunities for physical education and physical activity during the school day, *particularly at the elementary school level.*

*The Washington Post* recently ran an article highlighting the tension between academic achievement and the need to educate and nurture the whole child via physical education, the arts, and other creative outlets (February 28, 2008). The article aptly summarized an issue on the minds of parents, health professionals, and policy makers across the country. While we can all agree that closing the achievement gap and raising academic achievement across the board are – and should continue to be – the primary mission of our school system, we must not lose sight of our larger commitment to the whole child.

There are many jurisdictions in the state of Maryland and across the country that are offering more physical education per week in elementary school than we are in Montgomery County where the average elementary school student currently receives 30–45 minutes of physical education per week. For example, both Howard County and

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Carroll County currently provide ninety minutes of physical education per week in their elementary schools. There are also jurisdictions that are proving that you can have healthy, happy, active kids while still maintaining high levels of achievement, and there are jurisdictions that are proving that children learn better when their bodies have been exercised. In fact, research shows that physical activity actually enhances brain development and the potential for academic progress. This conclusion was supported by Debra Viadero's recent article in *Education Week* on February 12, "Exercise Seen as Priming Pump for Students' Academic Strides: Case grows stronger for physical activity's link to improved brain function."

We firmly believe that academic achievement and physical education need not be at odds with one another. We believe that we can have both and therefore, respectfully request that the Board of Education work collaboratively with the Council to examine the current state of physical education in the County. Specifically, we would ask you to consider the following actions:

1) Collect data on current physical education offerings in each MCPS school;
2) Compare and contrast current MCPS recommendations, requirements, and actual offerings with other Maryland jurisdictions as well as other jurisdictions across the country;
3) Analyze the feasibility of increasing the number of minutes of P.E. provided at the elementary school level and consider the use of a pilot program in order to closely monitor the impact upon student achievement;
4) While the larger issues are examined, take advantage of ways in which opportunities for physical fitness can be increased during the instructional day. For example, implement short sessions for physical movement in between subjects, additional recess opportunities, and the incorporation of physical activity/movement into the curriculum;
5) Consider reconvening the Wellness Committee to assist with these tasks.

Our greatest resource is our youth -- if we don't invest in them wisely, we will pay the price down the road. Let us work together to make the health and well-being of our children a greater priority in our schools and in our County. Let's stop talking about what we *don't* have time for, but what we *must* make time for and put Montgomery County on the leading edge of academic achievement *and* physical education.

We look forward to working with you on this very important issue.

Respectfully,

Roger Berliner
Councilmember, District 1

Valerie Ervin
Councilmember, District 5

cc: Dr. Jerry Weast, Superintendent of Schools
Members of the Board of Education
President Michael Knapp, County Council