



COMMISSION ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The Honorable Michael A. Durso
President
Montgomery County Board of Education
850 Hungerford Drive, Room 123
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Mr. Durso:

On behalf of the Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Superintendent's Recommended Fiscal Year 2018 Operating Budget. Like you, the Commission believes that a budget reflects the values of our community and we appreciate the Superintendent's emphasis on ensuring that our school system works for every child, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, religion, gender identity or national origin. We look forward to this focus on equity being woven throughout the budget and initiatives therein.

The Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth is concerned about a range of issues facing our local young people. As such, we must begin with gratitude for the Superintendent and Board of Education's statements of inclusion and your work to combat hate during these emotionally and politically-charged times. Our schools should be safe spaces and we appreciate your focus on cultural sensitivity and sanctuary.

To that end, we have heard several anecdotes of exciting programs being utilized at schools throughout the county. For example, Silver Spring International and Tilden Middle Schools participated in *Mix it Up at Lunch Day* (1). This experiential exercise provided the students and staff an opportunity to sit with someone new at lunch in an effort to foster an environment of tolerance and respect. At the same time, other schools appear to have engaged in few to no similar initiatives to improve communication and relationships. We believe that every student should be exposed to this type of programming at age-appropriate levels and, to that end, we ask that the school system establish a standard baseline of expectation for all schools. The benefits would be two-fold: improving acceptance of our differences as well as better strengthening relationships in general.

On December 5, 2016, the Commission on Children and Youth hosted its annual *Youth Having a Voice Roundtable* and were extremely fortunate to have two members of the Board of Education in our audience. This diverse group of young people from local high schools joined us for a profound discussion on the topic of youth suicide. Many youth in the room bravely shared personal stories about their own mental health struggles and suicide attempts and the experiences of love ones who died as the result of a suicide. A common theme amongst the participants was concern about the lack of resources or the lack of knowledge of resources available to students to assist with suicide prevention. We believe that every middle and high school would benefit from having a best practice suicide prevention program in place where both school professionals and peers could work together to create a multi-layer network of support.

Department of Health and Human Services

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Michael A. Durso, President
January 26, 2017
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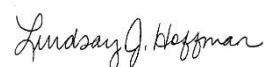
The other topic for discussion at the Roundtable was opioid abuse. Opioid abuse is a growing problem nationwide. Recent data suggests that communities are seeing a rise in both overdoses and fatalities from both prescription drug abuse as well as street drugs such as heroin. No community is immune as addiction to these powerful drugs cross all socio-economic lines. The Commission asked the Roundtable participants to share their knowledge and any potential experiences with opioids. Surprisingly, most students were generally unfamiliar with the word opioid. They were more familiar with common street names for drugs, but did not seem familiar with opioids in particular or how dangerous and addictive they are. Most participants also claimed not to have much experience with drug use, although some described knowing classmates or others who they know have used or been caught using drugs.

A key take away from the evening is a general lack of awareness of what opioids are, how addictive they can be, and the warning signs from people that are abusing opioids. Many cases of addiction have stemmed from an original prescription that turns into an addiction. Since opioids can be prescribed in children in this age group for athletic injuries and surgical procedures common with this same age group; tonsil and wisdom teeth removal, the Commission thinks it is important that they and their parents are more informed about this class of drugs. We believe that every middle and high school should offer a substance abuse prevention program to students and their parents to educate about the risk factors involved with opioid use.

On January 11, 2017, the Commission had the opportunity host Mr. Vernon Spriggs, Prevention Coordinator, Montgomery County Collaboration Council, as a guest speaker. Mr. Spriggs shared information about an outreach effort being utilized in schools to raise awareness about opioid abuse and overdoses entitled "Speak Up, Save a Life." The "Speak Up, Save a Life" program educates students, parent and community members about the opioid overdose epidemic and explaining how the Good Samaritan laws can save lives in a drug related emergency. In an effort to educate our youth about the dangers of opioid abuse, the Commission strongly believes that the "Speak Up, Save a Life" prevention program should be offered to every middle school and high school student in Montgomery County.

Thank you for your time, service and consideration. We look forward to seeing a budget that is reflective of the needs of the children and youth in our community.

Sincerely,



Lindsay Hoffman, Chair