

**Statement of Rachel Burton, Policy Specialist
Regarding the Fiscal Year 2010 Budget for the District of Columbia Public Schools
Before the Chancellor of the District of Columbia Public Schools
November 20, 2008**

Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Rachel Burton, and I am the Policy Specialist at The Arc of the District of Columbia (The Arc of DC). The Arc of DC is a 58 year-old nonprofit membership organization that serves individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families through supports and advocacy. Our goal is to ensure that people with disabilities have the opportunity to live, learn, work, and spend their leisure time alongside their neighbors as valued members of the Washington, DC community. We believe that inclusive educational opportunities pave the way for individuals with disabilities to contribute to and have an impact on their communities.

During the 2006-2007 school year, 15% of all public education students were in special education, according to the recent Brookings Institute report, *Quality Schools and Healthy Neighborhoods: A Research Report*. According to the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) Five-Year Plan, DCPS spends one-third of its budget on special education, a large portion of which is allocated to pay for nonpublic placements as well as the backlog from lawsuits. The Five-Year Plan seeks to reduce the number of nonpublic placements to channel more money to build quality programs for our students with disabilities in the District's schools. The emphasis on building public/private partnerships to get the community involved in leveraging resources for special education will provide even more opportunities and services for our students with disabilities (pg. 21). The Arc of DC is very excited about these prospects. Moreover, the focus on additional wrap-around services including social workers and psychologists addresses many deeper issues that effect student performance.

We would, however, like more information about the impact of greater inclusion under the Five-Year Plan on the SY 2010 budget, and how the Comprehensive Staffing Model supports the needs of students in special education and in cluster programs to ensure that all students have all aspects of their Individual Education Plan (IEP) fulfilled in addition to core staffing.

With the shift of funds back into local schools, The Arc of DC hopes to see more budget transparency, especially in the budget for special education and special education services and programs. We would also like to see more data on where students are and what their specific needs are. We recognize that DCPS is in the midst of changing its current data system, and we look forward to additional data in the future to be able to better serve our students. With regard to budget transparency and data, Montgomery County Public Schools Budget by Program¹, for example, lists each program along with a description and alignment with the strategic plan as well as the budget and number of students served. This is a very clear and easy way to see what programs are available to students as well as how much money is being spent and how many children are being served. This kind of document would be useful to parents and students in deciding if DCPS can meet their needs and would provide parents more of a roadmap to what services are available for their children.

The notice for this hearing stated that the Chancellor wishes to receive testimony on several budget related topics. The remainder of my testimony will address two of the requested topics as they relate to students receiving special education services: educational programs and levels of funding in surround jurisdictions; notably, Montgomery County. Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), a system of approximately 138,000 students,² continues to work to make their schools inclusive and work to best support the needs of students with disabilities. I will highlight a few of MCPS' programs that go beyond traditional educational programs to address the needs of students with disabilities.

First, School/Community-Based Programs (SCBP)³ serve students with moderate, severe, or profound mental retardation and/or multiple disabilities who have significant needs in the areas of communication, personal management, behavior management, and socialization. The Fundamental Life Skills and functional life skills curriculum are at the heart of this program in both general education classrooms and community and work settings with the goal of students having the skills they need as adults in vocational training, functional academics, community training, and socialization among others. I have heard from several DC parents who have said

¹ <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/budget/FY2009/approved/program.shtm>

² 511 students are in special schools.

³ http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/budget/FY2009/approved/pdf/program/special_education.pdf

that they would love for their children to learn how to wash and dry their own clothes as well as how to use public transportation, so including fundamental and functional life skills into the curriculum is paramount for some students with disabilities to ensure independent living. SCBP also promotes opportunities for students with disabilities to interact with their peers without disabilities and provides support for students as they access the general education classroom—helping to foster inclusion. Finally, SCBP prepares students for transition into the adult world upon exit from school. The funding level was approximately \$22,330 per student in FY 2009.

Second, MCPS Transition Services⁴ develops transition plans based on a student's IEP goals (ranging from education to vocational skills to daily living skills) and helps to provide linkages to postsecondary services and activities. Students must have these plans in place by at least the age of 16 so that they may begin planning for opportunities after graduation or upon exiting the system and are able to begin to forge a link with adult services to provide a seamless transition without a disruption in services. This is one of the main concerns parents have shared with me because they are nervous about what will happen to their child when he or she transitions out of school to postsecondary education or to the world of work. An additional key piece of the Transition Services that is very important for students is being educated with same-age peers. MCPS has a Transition Training for Independence class, a partnership between MCPS and the Workforce Development and Continuing Education Division of Montgomery College, which allows students with developmental disabilities ages 19-21 pursuing a Maryland High School Certificate the opportunity to be educated on a college campus with students their same age. The Transition Services program was funded at approximately \$830 per student in FY 2009 with over 6,100 students served.

Finally, MCPS' Special Education Instructional Support⁵, perhaps the most important piece when looking at the overall system, works to strengthen special education to provide supports for students to be successful and for teachers to have access to professional development opportunities to be able to better educate students. The support also aims to provide additional opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in and have access to the general education environment. The Special Education Instructional Support provides: stipends for

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

professional development; increased support to schools to promote least restrictive environment; funds for local travel; and textbooks, instructional materials, and equipment including assistive technology, among others. This program reaches beyond basic student support and looks at more systemic changes to supports not only for the student but also for the teacher, for students cannot achieve their potential without qualified teachers. The funding in FY 2009 was approximately \$10,500,000.

In closing, The Arc of DC has provided examples from MCPS to highlight additional programs that support and benefit students with disabilities, and through principles of inclusion students without disabilities. These programs just provide a few examples as to ways in which the public school system can support and educate students with disabilities, but it is also important to recognize the importance of adhering to an IEP; special education services, such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, etc; training and education for parents to be active participants in their children's lives; adaptive and accessible equipment and textbooks; safety, security, and bullying programs and prevention to help pave the way for inclusion; and transition planning at every transition stage and their impact on the budget. The Arc of DC looks forward to learning more about additional programs and supports being considered for students with disabilities as discussed in the Five-Year Plan. Thank you.