

PUBLIC COMMENT OF SHEREE BROWN-KAPLAN
CHAIR, FAIRFAX ALLIANCE FOR APPROPRIATE PUBLIC EDUCATION (FAAPE)

JANUARY 10, 2013

Good Evening Mr. Chairman and Members of the Board,

My name is Sheree Brown-Kaplan, and I am a long-time advocate for students with disabilities. On the first of this year, I facilitated the formation of a new organization to respond to the unmet needs of these special needs students: the Fairfax Alliance for Appropriate Public Education, to be known by the acronym FAAPE.

FAAPE is a coalition of parents, professional educators and community members who have joined together to advocate for policies and programs that deliver on the promise of IDEA for further education, employment and independent living. The mission of FAAPE is improved outcomes for students with disabilities through cooperation with policymakers and the implementation of proven best practices, peer-reviewed research and data-driven decision-making.

Tonight is the first of many opportunities for FAAPE to provide public comment, and I will address Policy 2671, Multi-Agency Placements for Children with Disabilities. Policy 2671 permits FCPS to place children with disabilities in non-public special education schools when it is unable to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) directly through its own facilities and personnel.

Some may consider a non-public school as a placement of last resort, necessitated by the nature and severity of the child's disability. However, a recent study by Johns Hopkins University demonstrates that students with disabilities who graduate from Maryland's nonpublic special education schools are more likely than their disabled peers in public school to be employed, enrolled in a post-secondary education and living independently.

For example, the percentage of students who graduated from Maryland's nonpublic schools and were employed within one year was 53 percent compared to 27 percent nationally. The number enrolled in a four-year college was 11 percent, compared to 4 percent in the national sample. In addition, approximately 16 percent of the nonpublic school students had been involved in the criminal justice system, while 58 percent in the national sample had been. http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/education/bs-md-ci-nonpublic-schools-20121231_0,7127360,full.story

It is not that Maryland's nonpublic schools have a greater amount of resources or better teachers than the state's public schools. Indeed, Maryland's public schools are considered by some to be among the best in the nation. Maryland's nonpublic schools have succeeded, to a large degree, because they have high expectations of their students, use research-based practices, understand their student's needs and help their students understand themselves. The result has been dramatically improved outcomes for students who present some of the greatest challenges to our education system.

FCPS provides appropriate services and supports to many students with disabilities. Yet, even with the wide range of resources and expertise available within the system, it's not enough. Students with disabilities in FCPS continue to face persistent achievement gaps, disproportional suspensions and poor graduation rates. We must do better.

FAAPE stands ready to work with both the Board and staff to help identify more effective approaches to serving the needs of children with disabilities. We look forward to a long and fruitful relationship that will benefit special needs students in FCPS.

Thank You.