

Subject: Urgent Concern: FY2027 Budget Cuts and the Future of Autism Services in MCPS

To the Members of the Board of Education,

I am writing to express strong opposition to the proposed FY2027 budget cuts to the MCPS Autism Unit and the specialized autism expertise that schools and families rely on every day. These cuts threaten the districtwide capacity to provide appropriate services to autistic students, ensure compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and deliver equitable support across all schools.

For instance, my child, who is in **[insert program name/school, if you wish]**, relies on the specialized expertise and coordinated support systems that the Autism Unit provides. **[Insert 1–3 sentences describing your child’s needs, recent challenges, and why specialized autism support matters.]**

My greatest concerns about these cuts are threefold:

- **Reduced expertise and support at a time of growth.** FY2027 budget cuts would drastically reduce autism expertise and support across MCPS by cutting leadership and specialized psychologists and shrinking staffing from approximately 19 to ~10.4 FTE—even as the autistic student population and the number of “classic autism” programs are projected to grow (with an estimated 10–13 additional elementary classes).
- **No clear replacement plan or accountable leadership.** MCPS has not provided a clear plan for what will replace the Autism Unit’s structure, oversight, and accountable leadership. MCPS has not communicated who will oversee autism services; ensure IDEA-required, evidence-based interventions are implemented equitably districtwide; stay current on best practices; or provide essential supports such as expertise at IEP meetings, consultation for educators, staff training, and coordinated, hands-on school support.
- **A major transparency and access gap for families and staff.** Despite MCPS’s professed commitment to transparency, the community was not informed for weeks about major eliminations that impact autism services (and other key positions affecting special education more broadly). Parents are unsure about which services and programs will continue, what staffing changes will occur, or who to contact for support that has historically come through the Autism Unit.

Autism services are not interchangeable with general staffing. IDEA requires evidence-based interventions, and those interventions must be implemented systematically and equitably across a large district—not only when a school happens to have internal expertise or the bandwidth to succeed through an extended trial-and-error process.

While MCPS has rolled out cross-functional teams in the past year, they are not functioning at a uniform, cohesive, and consistent level across the school system. Families have reported uneven results and inconsistent guidance—particularly when team members have varying experience levels in special education and may not have developed autism-specific expertise. Without a clearly defined unit, leadership, and accountability, autism services will become inconsistent from school to school, and students will lose access to the coordinated supports that make meaningful inclusion and appropriate programming possible.

In addition, MCPS must not overlook existing gaps in autism programming. Families have raised concerns about students who remain on the diploma track because they do not meet more restrictive criteria for Alternate Learning Outcomes (ALO) that MCPS implemented in recent years, and who may not have appropriate programming options today. Rather than addressing these gaps, cutting specialized autism leadership and expertise risks widening them.

Autistic students are entitled to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). The Autism Unit exists because specialized expertise, consistent oversight, and coordinated supports are essential to fulfilling this obligation in a district as large and complex as MCPS. We respectfully urge the Board to reject these cuts and require MCPS leadership to present a clear, public plan for autism services in SY2026–27—one that preserves autism-specific expertise, establishes accountability, and ensures equitable access to supports across all schools.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]
[School/Cluster (optional)]
[Parent/Guardian of an MCPS student (optional)]
