

4. Position Our Kids for Success in a DL Middle School (MS) Program

- Hello, my name is Martha Davis. I am the Mt. Vernon Community School PTA President, where I have two daughters, in second and fifth grade. I am here to speak about positioning our children for success in a middle school dual language program.
- ACPS plans to expand the DL program to the middle school level this fall with the hope of furthering the program goals of bilingualism, biliteracy, and cross-cultural understanding.
- Expansion will also promote the cognitive benefits and high levels of academic achievement associated with bilingualism.
- The MS program will consist of two courses in Spanish: Spanish language arts and one content area, social studies.
- We applaud ACPS for responding to requests from parents of current dual language students, a majority of whom have indicated in annual surveys that they would pursue this option if offered.
- However, parents are concerned that due to a lack of explicit Spanish language and literacy instruction in grades 3-5 and the absence of measures to assess student Spanish language progress, rising MS students will have a difficult transition to the new program.
- We also want to ensure that the two middle schools have equitable programs. As we expressed to ACPS leadership during our advocacy for a single MS program, we are fearful that a program at Hammond may not thrive due to the small size of the current fifth grade class at John Adams. Given a lack of communication to date, we fear parents may lack the enthusiasm and support for the program that ACPS anticipates.
- We recommend that joint Mount Vernon and John Adams “town hall” sessions for parents be scheduled ASAP as parents are already researching middle school options. We expect the issue of program equity and class size to be addressed explicitly in these town halls.
- We strongly believe a bridge program in the summer, between 5th and 6th grades, will be critical to ensuring a smooth transition to MS, particularly considering that our students have been learning Math and Science, not Social Studies, in Spanish and they have widely different levels of Spanish proficiency. A bridge program would be an asset to the students and their teachers and set

the kids up for success rather than getting overwhelmed and possibly dropping the program.

- Recently published data and our experiences with our children point to the need for robust differentiated learning and extra assistance for students to ensure success in a DL Social Studies course.
- Expansion needs to be properly staffed in order to ensure proper scaffolding between elementary, middle, and potentially a high school program.
- We cannot afford from an achievement perspective to staff an expanded DL program on a shoestring. ACPS should consider adding another DL coordinator to Central Office to take on the middle school mandate and work closely with the existing elementary-level coordinator.
- More staff would also afford ACPS the opportunity to incorporate the work of the DL program into the ACPS strategic plan, addressing equity and the large numbers of EL students in ACPS.
- Thank you. Our Committees will happily clarify any of these issues if you would like to meet with us.