

Good evening,

As a Montessori Parent, I have been consistently impressed by the quality of the program, the support of teachers and staff for my children, and the level of engagement from the community in the school.

But as the Executive Director of A+ Schools, I am concerned that the current iteration of the program has become emblematic of the inequities that the overall future ready plan is trying to address.

In a District that is 70% students of color, Montessori is 64% white. In a District where 23% of the students have a disability and services provided by an IEP, Montessori serves 19% of students with disabilities. And in a District that serves 64% Economically Disadvantaged students, Montessori has one of the lowest concentrations of ED students at 26%.

Montessori was not always a low poverty predominantly white school. In 2010, the school was 65% students of color and had higher rates of PSSA reading achievement for Black students than it does today.

The current set of choices, the school's location, and other factors have led to the shifts at the school, meaning that less students of color and students with disabilities experience the educational programming at Montessori.

The challenges upgrading the current space are not insurmountable, but they represent a trade off that will have less dollars available for capital improvements in other spaces. A move to Linden, especially if the less than 100 students that are there are given an opportunity to join the Montessori community, will increase the school's reach across racial and socioeconomic divides.

The community is right to be concerned about the future use of the building, and I would encourage the board and administration to consider a process for building disposition and sales that includes community input and involvement so that the development can be a net positive for the neighborhoods where buildings are closed.

Keeping Montessori as the only K-5 magnet post move, is also problematic, even with the benefits and investment that have been made into the program. Montessori's PreK-K mixed ages classrooms could serve as a model for all PreK-5 schools and provide our early educators a pay bump across the District. I would encourage the District to look at how the early years Montessori model could become a District-wide template for cooperative learning and pedagogy that can enhance the offerings for students regardless of neighborhood, where Montessori serves as a 4th teaching academy for PreK-2 educators.

Finally, I would encourage the board to adjust the magnet process for Montessori to create caps that meet the current legal requirements so that the school becomes more diverse by design. Providing more seats for economically disadvantaged students would pass both constitutional muster and help to undo the current segregation that the system has created at the school.