

November 2, 2010

Dear Legislators,

It is with a sense of urgency that we, the Montgomery County Board of Education and Administration, contact you in reference to the current state of our distance learning program. From the very beginning, our district's distance learning program has become a model for the state. As a result of being an early adopter for Learn and Earn Online, nine of the first 32 student ambassadors for that program were students from Montgomery County Schools. In addition, we were selected as a pilot district for North Carolina Virtual Public School (NCVPS). However, due to the ruling of the NC General Assembly, and since our local community college does not have a virtual or early college, we will not receive Learn and Earn funding, which puts our students at a huge disadvantage. Additionally, due to cuts in funding for NC Virtual Public Schools, our school system lost \$197,940.00 of allotted funding for 2010-2011.

As a small, rural school system, we jumped on this 21st Century way of learning. It helped to level the playing field for our students by providing rigor and more robust curriculum offerings through community college and UNCG iSchool classes, advanced placement courses, and NCVPS high school classes. During the 2009-10 school year, there was a 91 percent success rate, and 355 students took 609 classes. During summer 2010, there was a 93 percent success rate, and 49 students took 62 classes. Our success is a combination of student-driven curiosity with distance learning, support from school staff, and the availability of anytime/anywhere curriculum.

Unfortunately, three weeks before the 2010-2011 school year started, many of the course offerings were taken away from Montgomery County Schools. Due to cuts in funding for Learn and Earn Online, we lost 225 classes through our community college and 17 classes through UNCG-iSchool, a loss of 75 percent of the distance learning classes for fall 2010. Those classes were scheduled before school started and we would have picked up about 30 more classes by the time school started. Although our students could have taken classes at other community colleges with a virtual or early college, they were not able to do so due to the classes being full.

Montgomery County Schools Distance Learning Program is known throughout the world. We have presented to or talked with the following institutions or businesses: Harvard University, the Smithsonian, Washington Post, Carrboro Gazette, Florida Journal, Montgomery Herald, The Troy Post, and we have been invited to speak and share our success at: The Governor's luncheon, the Joint Education Committee, New Bern State Convention for Distance Learning, State Convention for Superintendents, several civic groups and church groups. Our latest accomplishment was with Blackboard Institute as we are a part of their research.

Our students were given hope four years ago that they could afford to go to college. Now, due to the current funding level, we are left wondering if we will be able continue our distance learning program at the same level or even if we will be able to offer it at all. We believe strongly that all of our students deserve to be served at the highest level. We cannot serve

students at a minimal level merely because they attend school in a small, rural county—our children deserve better.

Additionally, we are sure you are well aware of the 3.5 to 4 billion dollar deficit the state is facing. At issue here is the fact that 1.3 billion dollars in tax revenues sunset this year. These taxes have been on the books for a couple of years and people are now used to paying them. With the state facing such a deficit, how can we, in good conscience, cut a revenue stream of 1.3 billion from the budget? Like other school districts across the state, we are facing the challenge of providing a quality education to all students, with a lot fewer resources than we have had in past years. I urge you to strongly consider the devastating effects of allowing 1.3 billion dollars in tax revenues to sunset this year. Please focus your creative energies on fully funding our schools for the betterment of all North Carolinians.

Sincerely,

Dale Ellis, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Steve DeBerry,
Board of Education Chair