



September 26, 2008



Dr. Ronald A. Peiffer  
Deputy State Superintendent for Academic Policy  
Maryland State Department of Education  
200 West Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21201-2595

Dear Dr. Peiffer:

This letter is written to appeal the attendance rates calculated for Stephen Knolls School's 2008 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) determination. We ask that the attendance requirement for Stephen Knolls School be waived. The AYP attendance requirement is intended to provide another indicator of a school's academic attainment; however, in the case of Stephen Knolls School's student population, valid medical circumstances, rather than simple truancy, are typically at the root of long student absences. For this reason, we feel that holding Stephen Knolls School to the attendance requirement places our school and students in an untenable situation. If a student is justifiably absent due to fragile health, we feel that they should be exempt from AYP attendance statistics. It is important to note that Stephen Knolls School's students achieved high proficiency rates (87.5% for reading and 81.3% for mathematics)—impressive evidence of the academic strength of the student body. Meeting attendance requirements, then, becomes merely a technicality and does not reflect the spirit or intent of the law.

The Stephen Knolls School provides services to students aged 5 to 21 years old who have severe to profound cognitive and multiple disabilities. The Fundamental Life Skills (FLS) curriculum, aligned with the Voluntary State Curriculum, is utilized to provide students with skills in the academic content areas. The Stephen Knolls School provides instruction to improve the performance of its students in the following areas: communication, mobility, self-help, functional academics, and transition services. We have worked to ensure that all students who attend Stephen Knolls School have every opportunity to learn. Unfortunately, due to the medical fragility of the school's population, the students are frequently unable to attend school. The attendance is out of our and the parents' control. When the students are in school, we provide every opportunity for instruction. There are frequent times that medical safety takes precedence over instruction.

To support our contention that these absences are justified and unavoidable, a list of students who had high absence rates due to their medical conditions is attached. Their days of absence and a more detailed description of their medical circumstances also are provided. The days absent for these students alone exceed 1000 days, which is almost 100 percent of the 1008.5 days absent documented in the AYP statistic. The six most fragile students accounted for 601 absent days, which is approximately 60 percent of the days absent documented in the AYP

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statistic. According to our calculations, Stephen Knolls would have met the AYP attendance requirement with just 321 additional days of attendance.

Ms. E. Grace Chesney, supervisor of testing in the Office of Shared Accountability, will serve as the contact person for MCPS. She can be reached at 301-279-3595, or by e-mail at [Elizabeth\\_Chesney@mcpsmd.org](mailto:Elizabeth_Chesney@mcpsmd.org).

Respectfully,



Jerry D. Weast, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools

JDW:egc

Enclosure

Copy to:

- Mr. Bowers
- Dr. Lacey
- Ms. Leleck
- Mr. Bedford
- Dr. Morrison
- Dr. Scott
- Mr. Talley
- Dr. Wright
- Dr. Brake
- Ms. Chesney
- Ms. Mason
- Ms. Mills
- Dr. Newsome
- Ms. Shrewsbury