

# **The Learning Center at Burning Tree Elementary**

*The first in a series of articles to raise awareness about the Learning Center Program*

Burning Tree is one of 11 elementary schools in Montgomery County with an Elementary Learning Center serving children with multiple needs in grades K-5. The goal of the Learning Centers is to provide comprehensive special education instruction and related services to students with multiple needs and varied disabilities to enable students to achieve success in the MCPS curriculum. The types of disabilities served include learning disabilities and language, emotional, visual, hearing and health impairments.

Currently there are 47 students enrolled in the Learning Center in all grades. Burning Tree employs an inclusion model to integrate Learning Center students into the general education classroom. In general terms inclusion is defined as being included; to consider as part of a whole. The inclusion model provides opportunities for students with disabilities to learn and interact with their non disabled peers to the maximum extent possible in general education environments.

Learning Center classes typically have a lower student to teacher ratio and instruction is individualized to meet the needs of the students. Many Learning Center students are fully immersed in a general education classroom or “mainstreamed” into general education classes throughout the day as appropriate.

On back to school night, information regarding inclusion research and the benefits of inclusion was present and made available. A brief summary of the information follows: Research on inclusion point to the positive results of inclusion. Lipsky and Gartner (1997) concluded that the data show “a strong trend toward improved student outcomes (academically, socially, and behaviorally) for both special education and general education students. (pg.197)”

Inclusion benefits both students with disabilities and their non disabled peers. A few of the benefits for students with disabilities include:

- Peer interaction and acceptance
- Belonging to a group of peers
- Improved communication skills and social cues
- Modeling of good, positive behavior
- Exposure to real world situations

The benefits for non disabled peers include:

- Empathy
- Acceptance of differences and tolerance
- Opportunity to be a role model, opportunity for leadership
- Compassion
- Develop problem solving skills

If you have specific questions about the Learning Center please call Dr. Chaset, Mr. Tark or Dana Cook.