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Montgomery County group to study 'at-risk' youth

Disproportionate number of black students are labeled emotionally disturbed

By Courtney Mabeus
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A coalition of Montgomery County leaders announced an initiative Tuesday to identify problems putting children "at risk" after the group learned a majority of the affected children are black.

"At-risk" children are defined as those who might wind up requiring special education programs or

those who are in the juvenile justice or child welfare systems, county officials said.

Black students constitute about 21 percent of the county's school-age population, but represent a little more than 36 percent of the children labeled emotionally disturbed in the county's special education programs, according to a report by the county's interagency project.

In addition, about 48 percent of children in the county's juvenile detention system were black while about 38 percent were white, the report says. The report uses data from 2000 and court log numbers from 2004 and '05.

"It's not just a public safety is-

sue," said Montgomery County Council Member Mike Subin, who introduced the initiative joined by Council Members Nancy Floreen and Mike Knapp. "It's not just an education issue. It's a moral issue. Somehow, some way, the cards have been stacked against these kids, and we're going to unstack them."

The council members were ac-

companied by Sheriff Raymond Kight, Board of Education member Valerie Ervin and Deputy State's Attorney John McCarthy, all of whom are participating in the initiative along with businesses, including Pepco.

Council members said they plan to look at the county's school, juvenile justice system and child welfare

programs to identify trends putting children at risk. There is no time line for issuing a report.

Subin said he believed the problems were beginning at home for many children.

"If I had to take a guess, it would have something to do with family stability," he said.

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