

All MCPS Staff

**From:** Zuckerman, Andrew M.

**Sent:** Thursday, September 27, 2018 6:04 a.m.

**Subject:** Requesting Leave When You Have No Paid Leave Left—Absence Without Available Leave

Dear MCPS Colleagues,

Congratulations on a strong start to the 2018–2019 school year! I hope you are having a great first month of school.

Before we get too far into the school year, I wanted to share an important update on use of leave. This summer we reviewed our operational data and noticed a concerning aspect to it. At an increasing rate, some employees are running out of their available paid leave and continuing to take unpaid leave—even though they have no paid leave left. In SY 2016-2017, for example, there were over 22,000 days of *unpaid* leave used **after employees exhausted** their available *paid* leave. This is called absence without available leave, or AWAL for short.

As the data shows, 22,000 is a very high number of AWAL days for a single school year and an issue we need to address collectively. For many reasons absence without available leave, or AWAL, is problematic for school districts and organizations, including the impact it has on school district operations, finances, morale, and most importantly, student achievement.

Given the impact excess leave has on our work to educate students, I want to clarify that going forward, beginning at the start of the second marking period on November 8, 2018, unpaid leave must be **officially authorized before employees take it**. It is important for everyone to know that unpaid leave without authorization—even for sick leave—is not a form of available leave in MCPS. Knowing this information, it is important we all manage our use of paid leave as the school year goes on. We want to avoid people finding themselves in AWAL situations that are not authorized. When this occurs, employees are subject to disciplinary action.

I have provided more information below on how to seek authorization for absences without available leave as well as information about an upgrade to our business information technology systems that will help employees manage their leave in the future. For now, though, I wanted to make sure everyone is aware of the AWAL issue and how we will be approaching it going forward. Given the impact AWAL has on our operations and our core mission of student learning, we need to address this issue together as a school system.

As we move forward, I want to thank you for your support in this effort. We appreciate everyone's work in service of our students and their learning, and wish you a successful school year. If you have any questions about this issue, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Sincerely,

Andrew M. Zuckerman  
Chief Operating Officer  
Montgomery County Public Schools

## Options for Employees Who Exhaust Paid Leave

So, how do you seek authorization to take leave—either paid or unpaid—if you have run out of available leave? In these cases, there are several options available to employees, including:

- Sick Leave Bank. This is paid sick leave available to members of sick leave banks in all three bargaining units for qualifying events.
- Family Crisis Medical Leave Bank. This is paid leave available to bargaining unit members of these banks for qualifying events.
- Unpaid leave of absence, which may be protected under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).
- Unpaid intermittent FMLA protected leave.

In addition, there may be limited situations in which unpaid leave may be approved that is not protected under FMLA after an employee has depleted paid leave, when there are extenuating circumstances. These situations will be looked at on a case-by-case basis by the leave administration unit in the MCPS Employee and Retiree Service Center in consultation with supervisors.

However, please note that while these options are available, they all require consultation with, or approval through, the leave administration unit in the Employee and Retiree Service Center. Going forward, supervisors will be required to consult with this department prior to authorizing unpaid leave. For information on how to request these types of leave, please visit the Employee and Retiree Services Center [website](#).

## Business Information Systems Upgrade - Employee Paid Leave Countdown

We are making some changes to our technology business information systems so that employees will be notified as they get closer to exhausting their paid leave benefit for the year. Later this school year, we will have the functionality whereby employees and their supervisors will receive an e-mail notification when they have 16 hours (2 days) of paid leave remaining and when they have exhausted leave completely, so these employees can plan accordingly if additional paid or unpaid leave will be requested. We also have a long term goal of providing employees and supervisors with a leave usage data dashboard to help manage this process in the future, but that is still in the design stages.