

A Message from the Board of Education: Safe and Welcoming Schools for All Students

Dear MCPS Families:

Happy New Year! As we begin 2017, we want to take this opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to providing a safe and welcoming environment for every MCPS student to learn.

Montgomery County has experienced an increase in hate-based incidents in the community in recent months, including some that have affected our schools. While these incidents are not unique to our county and are a reflection of what we are seeing across the nation, please know that MCPS is working with the Montgomery County Police Department and is taking all necessary steps to address these incidents. These hate-based actions by a small handful of people are wrong and antithetical to our core values of respect and equity, which are fundamental to ensuring student learning. As Superintendent Jack R. Smith has stated, MCPS will not tolerate this behavior.

Disciplinary action represents only one tactic MCPS uses to ensure our schools remain welcoming and safe for all. MCPS takes proactive steps to promote cultural understanding and celebrate diversity in our classrooms and schools. From English and social studies to physical education and health education, MCPS students are exposed to diverse perspectives; examine the cultural beliefs, customs and traditions of people from different backgrounds; are taught about acceptance and respect for others; and learn about culture as part of building cultural awareness and appreciation for others.

Through our Study Circles program, we provide students, staff and parents with resources to engage in uncomfortable but critical conversations about race, religion and culture. These conversations allow us to hear about and learn from different perspectives other than our own. In partnership with the faith communities of Montgomery County, MCPS also has developed *Guidelines for Respecting Religious Diversity*. These guidelines are part of our commitment to ensuring all of our students have the right to express their religious beliefs and practices, free from discrimination, bullying or harassment.

Cultural competency training is also a key component in our effort to ensure a welcoming learning environment for students. We know that race and culture have a direct influence on teaching and learning. Through the MCPS Equity Initiatives Unit, we help our educators build cultural proficiency so they can

successfully incorporate classroom practices, structures and processes that eliminate inequities based on race and ethnicity and build successful relationships that nurture high achievement across all diverse backgrounds. The MCPS Office of Human Resources and Development also is proactively recruiting more educators from historically underrepresented communities so that students have diverse role models in their schools.

We also have heard your concerns regarding the welfare of undocumented students. Let me be clear, MCPS remains a welcoming learning environment for all students, regardless of immigration status. While as a general matter, Immigration and Customs Enforcement treats schools as sensitive areas where arrests, interviews, searches and surveillance will not occur; MCPS administrators are closely monitoring the situation. We have, and will continue to, inform our staff that they should not take any actions that may discourage the participation or lead to the exclusion of students based on immigration status. Supporting students and their families is a priority for MCPS. The Montgomery County Council recently passed a resolution on this issue.

MCPS will continue to strengthen its commitment to equity and equality in our schools. The recommended operating budget for next year, which serves as a moral document for supporting student success, reflects this commitment through dedicated funds for equity initiatives, such as the Minority Scholars Program for students and implicit bias training for staff.

The mission of our school system is to ensure every student will have the academic, creative problem solving, and social emotional skills they need to be successful in college and career. To make sure we can assist them in achieving this goal, we must first provide a safe, welcoming place for all students to learn. The Board of Education has and will continue to strongly advance and enact policies that support the well-being of all students and protect them from all forms of harassment, bullying or discrimination.

We wish you and your family the best for the new year.

Sincerely,

Michael A. Durso

President, Montgomery County Board of Education