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Press Release

Montgomery County Education Association's Response to MCPS's August 8th Press Conference

Today the Superintendent of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), Dr. Monifa McKnight, held a press conference to assure the public that there will be adequate staffing in schools this year. Dr. McKnight explained the last-minute recruitment efforts underway as hundreds of jobs remain unfilled just three weeks before our students and teachers return to classrooms. Members of the Montgomery County Education Association (MCEA) are gratified to see the school system stepping up its efforts to attract new educators and support staff. But we cannot help but wonder: why only now is the superintendent expressing a sense of urgency about the shortage of school personnel?

MCEA has been warning Dr. McKnight, MCPS, and the Board of Education for many months that the exodus of teachers and other staff poses trouble for staffing in the 2022-2023 school year. In the past year more than 1,100 teachers left MCPS, surpassing the number of resignations and retirements in any previous year. And many are not just leaving MCPS, they are leaving the profession for better pay and better working conditions in other sectors. We have also expressed concerns regarding the shrinking number of job seekers entering the education profession. Schools of education across the state and country have seen their enrollments decline precipitously as students increasingly view teaching as an undesirable career path.

Why are we in this current staffing crisis here in MCPS, a system that still enjoys a high ranking nationally? MCPS has too often dismissed educators' pleas for workload relief and rejected proposals to address staff burnout. Today the superintendent casually mentioned that there are staffing shortages every year. What she failed to point out is that every year it falls on existing staff to shoulder the additional burdens. Talented people know that if they want a decent work/life balance, fair compensation, and professional respect, they must look elsewhere for employment.

The increasing strain and burnout among those who remain will make it difficult to provide the excellent education our students deserve. While we appreciate the commitment to wellness that Dr. McKnight discussed during her press conference, the reality is that to ensure staff wellness, educators must be compensated fairly and treated with dignity.

MCEA is currently in impact negotiations with MCPS to restore respect for the profession and create a humane environment for teaching and learning that benefits all students. Unfortunately, while MCPS offers lip service, our members continue to experience ongoing disrespect. A glaring example: teachers are being reassigned to a different worksite less than a month before the start of the academic year, even though an explicit contractual deadline for involuntary transfers occurred six months ago.

Meanwhile, MCPS continues to drag its heels when we make commonsense proposals to improve working conditions. We agree with the superintendent when she says it is an honor to serve in public education, but we must also honor educators with appropriate compensation, good working conditions, and reasonable workloads.

Despite these difficult circumstances, we remain committed to working at the bargaining table and we see some reasons to be hopeful. This summer several experienced leaders have joined the higher levels of MCPS management. They have expressed a desire to reset the relationship with MCEA and have us once again become respected partners. But their actions must follow their words. If MCPS management and the Board wish to successfully address the staffing shortage, they must demonstrate a real commitment to honoring those of us who work directly with students.