

March 2020 update from the MCCPTA school climate and safety committee

Dear all:

This is an attempt to summarize some of what we have been working on lately.

THREATS AGAINST SCHOOLS – More than 20 threats have been made against high schools and middle schools across the county since the start of the school year, including a spate of threats against MCPS high schools in February. There was a [threat against Blair High School](#) on Feb. 9th, leading to the absence of 700 students. During the same week, [5 Clarksburg students were arrested for bringing a handgun to school](#) and [Wheaton, Edison, and Kennedy High School](#) responded to "nonviable" threats. The Montgomery County Department of Police released a [statement](#) on threats against schools on February 10th, reminding community members of charges that may be brought against those who threaten schools and urging parents to:

1. Monitor your child's social media and talk to him/her about using social media responsibly.
2. See something, say something – If you or your child become aware of a threat or other suspicious activity that is concerning, please call police. In regard to social media, please do not share the concerning message – again, call police.
3. Remind your child that any threat made will be investigated, even if the child's intention is to be humorous or as a retaliatory prank.

MCCPTA met with the MCPS Chief of Safety on February 21st to discuss how parents can work with MCPS to build awareness about, prevent, and respond to social media threats made against schools. Please make sure you and your family members are familiar with the [Safe Schools Maryland Tip Line](#). This is an important app to have on your phone. Make sure that you are signed up with [Alert MCPS](#) to receive emergency notifications.

RESOLUTION ON GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND SCHOOL SAFETY – The Board of Education will discuss the MCCPTA and the [Montgomery County Regional Student Government Association](#) (MCR-SGA) twin [resolutions on gun violence prevention and school safety](#) at the [May 5th policy committee meeting](#). If you would like to reach out to the MCPS Board of Education to, please [contact members](#) individually. Meanwhile, Maryland PTA will vote on a resolution inspired by the MCCPTA resolution this weekend. If passed, it will be taken forward for general approval at the MDPTA convention in July. The resolutions are informed by research and seek to close the gap between what we know and what we do to prevent gun violence in our schools and communities. Similar policies have passed in California, led by Los Angeles (nearly 700,000 students) and followed by an additional 5 districts. Denver public schools (nearly 100,000 students) passed a resolution on 1/24/20, and a resolution was introduced in St. Louis in January. Phoenix is also considering a similar resolution.

SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS (SRO) – In October, the County Council introduced [Bill 33-19, Police - Community Policing](#), which aims to formalize community policing guidelines, including School Resource Officers. Due to pushback from the community, the [County removed a requirement](#) that would have authorized the expansion of the SRO program. The current memorandum of understanding between MCPS and MCPS is available [here](#). [This Washington Post article](#) covers the ongoing debate.

SCHOOL DISCIPLINE – Parents and staff continue to express concern regarding some schools' handling of students with continued disruptive behavior. If a principal is not responsive to such concerns, it may make sense to reach out to the [OSSI director](#) for the school. The MCPS [Office for Student and Family Support and Engagement](#) may also be helpful in these situations. The MCPS Board of Education discussed student discipline on February 18th. Topics covered included [draft amendments](#) to Policy JGA, suspension data by student population group, restorative justice, de-escalation training for staff, comprehensive coordinated early intervention services plan. A recording of the discussion is accessible [here](#). The PowerPoint presentation, including data related to discipline, is accessible [here](#). A compilation of Maryland school discipline laws and regulations is [here](#).

SCHOOL CLIMATE – On Feb. 21, 2020, MCCPTA representatives met with MCPS staff from OSSI, OSA and OSFSE, to have a conversation about school climate surveys – history, goals and objectives. The following are the highlights from this meeting (thanks to Janet Sanchez for summarizing!):

- [MCPS Climate Surveys Background](#)

MCPS has been conducting the following 3 types of School Climate Surveys annually:

1. Staff
2. Parent
3. Student

Staff Climate Survey

MCPS has a long history of administering the Staff Climate survey for 15 – 20 years now. Specifically, in 2012, the Staff survey was discontinued and was replaced by the Gallup Staff Engagement survey. This was administered during the Fall for 3 consecutive years starting in 2012. Then in December of 2015, MCPS developed a plan to conduct a new internally-developed survey. This survey was first done during school year (SY) 2016-2017 and it included only school-based staff. However, starting with SY 2017-2018 – the survey was expanded to be administered to non-school based staff.

For this school year (2019-2020), the superintendent of schools and employee associations have requested that the survey be revised in order to meet the goals of the school system. A new multi-stakeholder workgroup was therefore formed to develop the improved survey and the 2 broad objectives were:

1. To measure the level of satisfaction with the workplace climate
2. To measure the engagement of MCPS staff

Additional questions were added targeting the School-based staff only. The objective of this was to measure the staffs' perceptions of their school climate. The revised Staff survey will be administered this May.

Student Climate Survey

The first Student Climate survey published by MCPS on their website was from SY 2005-2006. From 2007 to 2012, the survey administered consisted of 2 parts: School environment and Support services. Then from 2012 to 2014, similar to the Staff survey, the Student survey was done in partnership with Gallup and the objectives were:

1. To measure employee and student engagement
2. To use the results to help guide the School Improvement efforts

In SY 2016-2017, no survey was conducted but a Student Voice Project Team was initiated. However, this was suspended due to news about the upcoming MSDE Student Survey. This MSDE Student survey was administered one year late, i.e., in 2019 – and only in Grades 5 through 11.

Parent Climate Survey

Parent Climate survey was first administered in 2005 and it has been done annually to a random sample size. The current format and questions are comparable back to that of 2013. The survey contains 23 items that focus on the opportunities the school provide for the following:

1. To encourage parent engagement
2. To promote collaborative school and home relationships

This school year, all parents will receive the survey and those with multiple children in school will get it more than once. Next year, a multi-stakeholder group will be created to revisit the Parent Climate survey.

- Discussion and Questions raised

- The new MSDE School report survey was administered in April of last year and the results were released in December 2019. This is the first time that a school's ranking will be affected based on the results of this survey. Also, the information provided by this survey will affect the work done by OSFSE. However, there are concerns that the type of questions on this survey are not specific enough and some of our most vulnerable populations (examples: undocumented, LGBTQ) are not represented.
- Questions raised by MCCPTA include doing a Student School Climate survey with more specific questions about feeling safe, relationships with staff, being heard and their level of satisfaction with the services they are receiving. We need to analyze things in depth regarding the school's environment. More importantly, is there a way to tie in the Climate survey to School Improvement plan (SIP) since School Climate is a key part of the SIP?
- Student Climate survey might not be the best method to collect information from our students maybe having focus groups is more effective. Engaging SGA (Student Government Associations) to collect data is an option. We are aware that we don't want to survey the students a lot. Community circles were also brought up as another way of gathering data.

- The use of CDC's YRBSS (Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System) was also brought up. Can we tailor this tool to gather information regarding school climate? However, concerns about the teachers union's restrictions/limitations on what type of questions can be asked were also raised.
 - Additional concerns raised were about publishing negative data about specific schools and its impact to the community such as high incidence of drugs, alcohol, etc.
 - OSFSE will revisit the Student Voice project which was started but suspended in 2016-2017 school year. Currently, there is a project led by Lindsey Cao where 2 – 3 students from each high school are part of a group discussion focused on College readiness and Mental Health.
 - The group needs to determine what we would like to accomplish through surveys, what are the limitations of our current surveys and how is the information being used by school administration.
- **FACEBOOK** – We have set up a moderated Facebook page to exchange information related to school climate and safety. You can find it by searching MCCPTA school climate and safety or going to [this link](#).

***Please note: Ed Clarke, MCPS Chief of Safety, would welcome a running list of school-specific safety/security concerns. Please send these to climateandsafety@mccpta.org so that we can keep a compiled list to share with him.**