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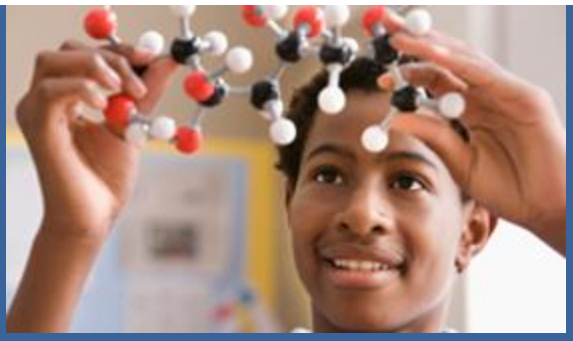

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Final Security Report

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Introduction

On February 14, 2018 tragedy struck Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Sadly, only a few weeks later another tragedy unfolded at Great Mills High School in St. Mary's County in Maryland as a result of gun violence. These recent school shootings have deeply affected Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) as we grapple with the loss of life in one our most sacred institutions. Our students, staff, and community have come together demanding an end to such violence in schools, and the Board of Education unanimously adopted a resolution which reads, in part:

"The safety of students and staff is a priority…as safe learning environments are necessary for academic achievement and emotional well-being…The Montgomery County Board of Education supports efforts to create safer, more peaceful schools that are free from the destructive influence of violence."

[Read the full resolution HERE]
In addition, the Board directed the Superintendent to continue his review of school system safety and security. In spring 2017, MCPS launched a comprehensive review of MCPS protocols, practices, and infrastructure related to the critical imperative of maintaining safe, orderly learning environments for all students. In summer 2017, MCPS released the *Interim Report: School Safety & Security Focusing on High Schools*, which specifically related to MCPS high schools. These recommendations in the *Interim Report* are grouped into the following seven key priority areas:

1. Data-driven accountability for school safety and positive school culture as a system priority across MCPS.

2. Effective allocation, utilization, and management of school security personnel and other staff.

3. Technology infrastructure, including security cameras, and their use.

4. Facility enhancements to restrict or limit access to more isolated areas of school buildings and grounds.

5. Procedures and practices for supporting positive student behavior throughout the school day.

6. Systemwide prevention and early intervention programs.

7. Collaboration with law enforcement and other partner agencies.

This *Final Report* reaffirms these priority recommendations for MCPS high schools and expands them to elementary and middle schools. The final report also provides an update on several key developments inside MCPS since the release of the *Interim Report*. Perhaps most importantly, this report includes an addendum with the short-term and immediate action plan MCPS is taking since the school shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas and Great Mills high schools. This action plan reflects steps that can be taken immediately to address system needs in certain key areas of facilities, technology, and training.

For the past six weeks, stakeholders across Montgomery County have come together in a variety of forums to discuss what more can be done, both immediately and over the long-term, to prevent a school shooting from occurring in one of our schools. From student town halls to the Montgomery County Council of Parent Teacher Associations (MCCPTA) Delegates Assembly to Board of Education meetings, the MCPS community has been deeply engaged with this issue. The final report contains important recommendations for MCPS to organize around as we continue to strengthen and enhance our strategic approach to system-wide safety and security; however, there are immediate and short-term actions we are taking in response both recent school shootings that are emphasized in the addendum.

Ultimately, student learning is our core mission, but safety and security remains our top priority. Safe learning environments—both physically safe and emotionally safe—are preconditions for the opportunity to learn. At MCPS we recognize the criticality of student and staff safety, and this report provides the road map for building on our existing infrastructure and practices as a part of our overall district plan for continued operational excellence.

Elementary and Middle School Review

Since the release of the Interim Report, which focused on high schools, MCPS conducted a comprehensive review of school safety practices in elementary and middle

schools. This review took place from October to December 2017, and encompassed a total of 133 elementary and 40 middle schools. Initial reviews of six elementary and 12 middle schools were conducted in coordination with returning external consultants, Mr. James Kelly and Mr. William Modzeleski, both subject matter experts in the area of school safety and security. The consultants worked in collaboration with staff from the Department of School Safety and Security (DSSS) to review 18 schools initially, and this initial review informed the model approach for subsequent reviews of the remaining schools. DSSS staff led the review of the remaining 127 elementary schools and 28 middle schools. These reviews included meetings with school administrators and school-based security personnel on the specific issues and experiences of their schools. The recommendations in this *Final Report* focusing on MCPS elementary and middle schools are grouped into the same seven key priority areas that were developed in the interim report for high schools. The results of many of the school reviews were examined by both consultants and reviewed by DSSS leadership, and they provide the foundation for the updated information provided in this *Final Report*.

As with the high school reviews, it is important to remember that while every school experiences some school safety related concerns, and while they may vary, schools are generally safe places for students and staff. The review illustrated that many of the same themes and areas that require attention in high schools also are present in the elementary and middle school context.

As a result, all of the findings and recommendations found in the *Interim Report* also are broadly relevant to elementary and middle schools with some variations as discussed below. MCPS will need to differentiate how the recommendations apply to the context of each school level and will need to work to modify implementation of the recommendations in a manner that is tailored and appropriate for the school level and age of the student population. This report outlines the key priority areas for high schools as they relate to the elementary and middle school levels.

- **Data-driven accountability for school safety and positive school culture as a system priority across MCPS**. The recommendations regarding data collection and analysis are equally critical at the elementary and middle school levels, where they will continue to inform our understanding of the effect of school climate and culture on security throughout MCPS. A large number of

schools at the elementary and middle school levels stated that their biggest concern regarding safety is not serious criminal acts, but less serious incidents such as bullying, disorderly conduct, fighting, and disrespect of authority. Further, many of the elementary schools expressed that the majority of their safety-related problems occurred during arrival and dismissal procedures. A concern raised at both school levels included a school's proximity to other schools, community centers, malls and shopping centers, or any public or highly trafficked areas as some of the unacceptable behaviors that can occur in these public environments may carry over into the school environment. As MCPS has no direct control over these issues, they are best addressed through collaboration with local government. Where MCPS does have control, at least during the school day, is with the layers of security measures used to insulate and protect students, staff, and visitors while they are on campus.

It is important to note that, as is to be expected, the elementary and middle school levels experience overall fewer and less serious security issues than are found at the high school level. Data will be important to further quantify these anecdotal reports and to evaluate the impact that the information may have on operations and school practices. There are currently several data collection strategies utilized by both elementary and middle schools. While every school collects data, the data that is collected varies and some schools collect more than others. Therefore, there needs to be a more consistent and systemic approach to data collection and its strategic use by schools to make decisions related to the safety and well-being of students, staff, and visitors. In particular, social-emotional and functional behavioral assessments data and behavior intervention plans should be added to data collection at all levels, but especially in elementary schools.

Information about behavioral assessments and intervention plans are collected and analyzed through the Office of Student and Family Support and Engagement. Subject matter experts such as school psychologists, pupil personnel workers, and placement specialists work directly with students and their families to address the specific needs of students. Data should be shared with other school system offices such as the Office of School Support and Improvement (OSSI) and DSSS when permissible in order to increase

awareness, communication, and tailored student support. While this communication process is largely in place currently, there continues to be an opportunity for improvement. In addition to bolstering inter-departmental communication, another goal is to develop one comprehensive strategy for data collection and how the data drives decision-making.

- **Effective allocation, utilization, and management of school security personnel and other staff.** All of the recommendations in the high school report also apply to middle schools. MCPS will need to maximize the role of our dedicated security staff at the middle school level. It will be important to review the model for staff allocation and deployment across the variety of size and environment experienced in MCPS middle schools. Moreover, staff training should be focused and adjusted to distinguish the differing needs of elementary versus middle schools. For example, the amount of security staff that one middle school is allocated may vary the roles of other staff considerably.

  Elementary schools do not have dedicated school-based security staff, but rather utilize on-site school staff for emergencies or unique situations. It also is routine for school staff to receive assistance from DSSS staff such as the cluster security coordinator or security personnel from a neighboring school if and when needed.

  Elementary school days are more structured with adult supervision covering almost all aspects of a student's day including classroom instruction, lunch, and recess. In contrast to secondary schools, class transitions are almost always supervised by teachers and support staff. However, daily operational procedures for the management and supervision of students both inside and outside of the school building remain critical to align to best practices for the safety and well-being of elementary-aged students.

  An important part of our security structure for schools at all levels is that each school has an On-Site Emergency Team (OSET) that functions as a resource and response team for crises and emergencies. MCPS should consider further development and possible expansion of the roles and responsibilities of the OSET at each school level. Particular guidance can focus on the relationship between OSET team members and any dedicated security staff as well as the

cluster and department level security supports. Specific team trainings should be developed and address verbal de-escalation skills and restraint techniques for use during crisis prevention and intervention situations. Principals also may elect to designate other school staff members to intercede if a disturbance or disruption occurs during the school day in addition to responding with members of the OSET. This may be particularly important in situations when members of the OSET are off-site, and how other staff must respond to a crisis.

Training surfaced repeatedly as an area in need of focus for elementary and middle school staff related to security concerns. Some areas that may be particularly relevant to these school levels include social media, behavioral management, and de-escalation techniques. To build the capacity of more school-based staff at these levels to support safety and security, trainings will need to include a broad range of positions. Developing training programs at each school level will be an all-inclusive process both within MCPS and in partnership with outside agencies. Within MCPS, offices and divisions will need to collaborate to align training objectives and outcomes. In addition, MCPS will work with partner agencies such as the Department of Health and Human Services, the Maryland State's Attorney's Office, and the Montgomery County Police Department to leverage the subject matter expertise in these areas.

- **Technology infrastructure, including security cameras, and their use.** All recommendations in the high school report also apply to middle and elementary schools with the exception of security cameras, which are not generally utilized at the elementary school level at present. However, all schools are equipped with Access Control Systems (ACS), which include a camera at entrances. These cameras allow individuals monitoring inside the school to view the visitor before allowing access to the school.

  The systemic work that is ongoing to assess the technology infrastructure at high schools also will incorporate ongoing review of the elementary and middle school context. For example, the most strategic and cost-effective deployment approaches for security cameras at the high school level will necessarily be different than the approach that will be most successful at the elementary and

middle school levels. MCPS staff will continue to identify systemwide strategies for prioritization, placement, maintenance, and upgrades.

- **Facility enhancements to restrict or limit access to more isolated areas of school buildings and grounds.** All recommendations in the high school report also apply to middle schools with some variations. As with technology, the systemic work that is ongoing to assess facility infrastructure at high schools also will incorporate ongoing review of elementary and middle schools.

- **Procedures and practices for supporting positive student behavior throughout the school day.** Almost every elementary and middle school stated that it experienced challenges arising from students' interactions with each other on social media. The problems stemming from the use of social media ranged from gang recruitment to bullying, planning fights, and sending provocative pictures. Presently, administrators find themselves responding to issues from a reactionary perspective rather than getting ahead of the issues. In an effort to combat the negative social media impacts on students during the school day, school administrators should appoint a staff member to be responsible for social media. This individual should receive training from MCPS on various aspects of social media and should serve as a focal point for providing technical assistance and guidance on all social media issues.

  Developing a centralized training and reporting system led by a team composed of critical offices should also be considered in order to support school-based staff responsible for monitoring social media at their schools. Centralization will enable data and information sharing, standardization of social media governance and compliance, identification of patterns and trends, and the ability to launch corrective measures.

  Also, building on its digital citizenship initiative, MCPS should, on a regular basis, develop and disseminate Information Briefs on various issues related to the use of social media.

  Many middle schools also cited class transition times as vulnerable points of the school day when hundreds of students are in the hallways with reduced supervision. Congested hallways due to the large movements of people may

have unintended consequences such as student fights. Strategic placement of adults during transition and other activity periods during the school day may be a particularly effective way to support a safe and secure school climate in middle schools.

- **Systemwide prevention and early intervention programs.** All recommendations at the high school level apply to middle schools with some variations. The range and type of prevention and early intervention programs operating at the elementary and middle schools is qualitatively different than those at high schools. These school levels will need to have their own distinct inventory of school-sponsored programs with an eye to achieving objectives that are suited to younger students.

- **Collaboration with law enforcement and other partner agencies.** All recommendations at the high school level apply to middle schools with some variations. For example, elementary and middle schools do not have school resource officers (SROs) on site, but SROs are assigned to a high school and respond to feeder schools within the cluster when needed. This model is aligned with the DSSS cluster structure so that security coordinators respond to incidents within their assigned cluster with the SRO's support if needed.

Going forward, we will need to examine each priority area and recommendation through the specific lens of the most effective implementation and application for elementary, middle, and high schools. For elementary schools, three recommendations stand out in particular:

- **Technology:** MCPS will implement strategic placement of cameras at the elementary school level, in concert with the existing ACS, particularly in exterior locations when applicable.

- **Staffing:** The cluster security coordinators currently respond to and support most elementary school security needs. SROs can be called in to assist and lend support when asked. MCPS will examine the workload of the cluster security coordinators as well as other existing staff resources to more clearly differentiate workload responsibilities and deployment opportunities to directly support all elementary schools. At the elementary school level, which generally

does not have assigned security staff, MCPS should also consider developing a team at every school that can immediately respond to security issues. This team could be a subset of the work of the dedicated OSET, or responsibilities placed on additional staff members. Training should be an integral part of any team developed and should at a minimum address verbal de-escalation skills and restraint techniques.

- **Relocatable classrooms:** Each school must have an emergency plan and a component of this plan must contain procedures for students and staff in relocatable classrooms if emergencies occur. School emergency plans are reviewed each year and submitted to cluster security coordinators. In addition to these emergency plans, the principal and the OSSI director for each elementary school should review the school's daily operational procedures for the management and supervision of students who attend classrooms in relocatable classrooms to ensure alignment to best practices. Areas to review include student access to and from the main building, classroom transition procedures, and monitoring of students.

At the middle school level, three recommendations are of important note:

- **Security staffing model:** MCPS will need to maximize the role of our dedicated security staff at the middle school level. It will be important to review the model for staff allocation and deployment across the variety of size and environment experienced in MCPS middle schools. MCPS should develop written guidance for those schools depending on the level of school security staff that they are allocated, as the roles of such staff vary considerably from schools where there are multiple security personnel.

- **Training:** Security personnel and school administrators expressed a need for additional training to support the particular behavioral needs and experiences of middle school students, including social media issues as discussed above.

- **Adult supervision:** Strategic placement of adults during transition and other activity periods during the school day may be a particularly effective way to support a safe and secure school climate in middle schools.

Interim Report Status Updates

Since the development of the *Interim Report*, MCPS staff has been working to implement identified improvements in facilities and practices as well as to analyze next steps for structuring larger scale, systemwide recommendations. MCPS will take the same approach to respond to the findings for elementary and middle schools. This section provides a status report in key areas of work following the release of the *Interim Report*.

School-Level Approaches

The high school reviews identified adjustments in operational practices as well as small scale facility needs that were specific to each school. For example, some of the recommendations included altering existing school practices to better use and deploy resources at schools and providing facility and technological enhancements. Facilities and security staff have been working with school leadership to implement these particular identified practices and repairs. Many of the school-level items must remain confidential as they pertain to specific measures, practices, or facility elements that could compromise school security if widely known. Below are examples of some of the steps taken at high schools across the county with practices varying based on needs assessments specific to each school:

School Practices

- Security staff in buildings have been redeployed and shifts staggered to cover areas of concern or blind spots at specific times of the school day.
- School administration began academic and behavioral town hall meetings each quarter in classrooms which allow staff the opportunity to engage in small group discussions about safety and security.
- Schools implemented a color-coded pass system to include different passes for students of varying needs.

- Teachers and other instructional staff have been assigned to supervise lunch periods and other “zones” throughout the school day to provide more coverage.

Facility and Technological Enhancements

- Locks have been installed on previously unsecured doors to reduce entry/exit to areas with no adult supervision.
- Cross-corridor doors have been added to provide for separation of activities within the school building and to minimize unattended areas during after-school activities or other events outside of the school day.
- Work orders to repair ACS and Visitor Management System have been addressed.
- Security cameras have been strategically placed and repaired as needed.

Systemic Approaches

Several systemwide initiatives are underway to work in concert with the school-specific changes to enhance safety and security.

- **Vestibules (CIP)**

  One important feature of facility security is the controlled access and entrance to the school building. Most MCPS schools have a separated entry vestibule that restricts access to the building and guides visitors to the main office upon entering. Where feasible, MCPS has retrofitted older schools that were not designed with this feature to this standard. However, some have not had this upgrade due to difficulties presented by the structure of the facility and the entryway.

  The Board of Education requested a Capital Improvements Project for School Security totaling $4.9 million over the next two fiscal years to begin to address this remaining group of schools. Staff will develop individualized approaches to each school that will improve the physical security of the entrance with the objective of restricting access and allowing supervision of visitors upon entering the building.

- **Social Media Guidelines and Continued Vigilance**

  MCPS staff play important roles in the establishment and monitoring of social media, both through MCPS social media accounts and keeping current on MCPS related issues discussed on other social media platforms and accounts. MCPS has taken and will continue to pursue steps to increase cybercivility and internet safety among its employees, as well as the students and families that connect, read, and share information from these social media platforms. In fall 2017, the Department of Communications released *Social Media: Best Practices for Employees*, an extensive overview of how MCPS employees can best engage responsibly using social media while simultaneously protecting student and staff privacy.

  MCPS students also are responsible for their conduct on social media platforms. Bullying, harassment, and intimidation are not tolerated by MCPS, and any allegations are reported to appropriate staff members and investigated. As social media dominates many of the communication channels between students, cyberbullying is a continuing concern. Student accountability in instances of cyberbullying and other forms of harassment that may take place inside or outside the school building are codified in the *Student Code of Conduct 2017–2018.*

- **Restorative Practices**

  Restorative Justice is a social justice platform that allows for students to actively engage in problem-solving around disciplinary issues that affect self and community, take responsibility for their actions, and work with those affected to restore the community and members who were harmed as a result of those actions. MCPS, in collaboration with the RAND Foundation, has received a grant for $1.9 million to study the impact and complementarities between Restorative Justice and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in MCPS schools through December 2020.

  The three year grant will enable MCPS to:

  1. Provide dedicated staff to lead the work and collaborate with other offices to expand the scope of the work;

2. Utilize enhanced training at the school level; and

3. Collect data and analyze findings to enhance the implementation of Restorative Justice and PBIS.

- **Memorandum of Understanding with Law Enforcement**
  In October 2017, an updated Memorandum of Understanding between MCPS and local law enforcement agencies was issued and signed in an effort to enhance relationships and communication among the involved law enforcement agencies, MCPS, administrators, staff, students, parents, and community members. An additional section was added to address the need for gang awareness and to develop and implement gang prevention and intervention programs for MCPS students and their families with a focus on outreach to at-risk MCPS students. Continued collaboration with the Maryland State's Attorney's Office and law enforcement agencies will assist MCPS in developing ongoing gang awareness training for MCPS staff.

Security Strategic Plan

Many of the recommendations in the *Interim Report* require MCPS to review practices, procedures, and approaches at a system level. DSSS is leading an extensive plan to address the findings and recommendations in the *Interim Report,* which need further analysis to determine how to approach systemwide implementation. This process will take time to continue to work through with both central office and school based leadership. Some of the major elements of this plan are:

- Reviewing and updating security staff job descriptions and standard operating procedures for both school-based security staff and cluster security coordinators;
- Re-envisioning the recruitment and hiring processes for key security staff;
- Developing a staffing model for secondary schools using key security indicators;
- Improving data collection and reporting practices across school based and central processes;

- Review of technology to determine the most strategic and effective use of resources as well as to determine where additional resources may be needed; and
- Review of systemwide training offerings and requirements for staff and students.

These are some examples of long-term process review and analysis that will continue to align current DSSS operations to the best practices highlighted by the report. Many of the process and practice changes will require the collaboration of multiple MCPS offices and departments. It is likely that the nature of this work will require a greater amount of time to accurately study, define, and implement changes, while the immediate school-specific adjustments and repairs will continue to be implemented concurrently.

Conclusion

The work to support school safety and security is ongoing work that will extend and continue beyond this *Final Report*. The seven key priority areas identified in the report will guide the work going forward to maintain our focus on both school level and system level security at elementary, middle, and high schools as well as our other facilities. Our schools are generally safe places for students and staff. At the same time, we know that maintaining a safe and nurturing learning environment will require ongoing attention and continuous improvement on the part of our entire school community.

Addendum

- Interim Report: School Safety and Security (Focusing on High Schools)
- 45-Day Action Plan
- Safety and Security Strategic Plan

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