To: MCCPTA Board of Directors

From: Gail Ravnitzky Silberglied, Chair, Virtual Learning Ad Hoc Subcommittee

Date: January 25, 2021

**RE: Virtual Learning Committee Report**

**OVERVIEW**

* **About this Committee**—The Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Virtual Learning is a temporary MCCPTA committee created in August, 2020 to advocate for all MCPS students operating in the virtual learning environment.  The Committee has about 20 members and we welcome additions.  This is the Committee’s first report.
* **Meetings**—The Committee held meetings via Zoom on:  Thursday, September 24, Thursday, October 1, Monday, October 12, Monday, October 19, Thursday, November 5, Monday, November 16, Monday, December 7, Thursday, December 17, Tuesday, December 29, Thursday, January 7, and Monday, January 25.  Additional external meetings are noted below.
* **Collaboration**—We have worked collaboratively with members of other MCCPTA committees, including the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee (Mark Eckstein), the Special Education Committee (Rachel Tate and Stephanie Frumkin), the Safe Technology Committee (Lisa Cline), and the Mental Health and Wellness Subcommittee (Helga Luest).  Laura Stewart is our North Star.

**RECENT ACTIVITIES**

* **Special Education**—A few committee members met with the chair of the MCCPTA Special Education committee to discuss how students with disabilities are faring during virtual learning and how we can collaborate.  It’s not going well for many students.  We developed a 3-prong strategy:
  + On February 1st, at 7pm,  MCCPTA will host a **Town Hall meeting** where we will share stories about virtual learning with elected officials.  We are inviting MCPS, the school board, and Montgomery County Council.  Brenda Wolff (School Board President) and Kevin Lowndes (MCPS Associate Superintendent for Special Education) are confirmed to participate.  Reserve your spot by [registering](https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJ0rfu-trzgtGdYO1jIgI_HAI94ubfmVWb2S) today.
  + We drafted a **Petition** for an emergency solution for kids with special needs while distance learning continues.  As of today (1/25) the [Petition](http://bit.ly/PTA-petition) has over 350 signatures.
  + We are **Collecting Stories** about how distance learning has affected special education students and families.  These [Stories](http://bit.ly/PTAtestify) will be used to create a video to be shown during the Town Hall meeting on Feb. 1.
  + We also drafted **sample social media** posts to spread the word about these efforts.
    - *MCPS needs to take immediate action to support Special Education students.  Sign the MCCPTA petition today.  bit.ly/PTA-petition*
    - *I just signed a petition for immediate action to support MCPS students with disabilities. Will you join this effort?  Read and Sign the Petition today.*
    - *PTAs in Montgomery County are advocating for you.  How is virtual learning affecting your special education student?  Share Your Story and Sign the Petition today!*
    - *Join MCCPTA on February 1st, at 7pm for a Town Hall meeting on Special Education during Virtual Learning.  Reserve your spot by* [*registering*](https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJ0rfu-trzgtGdYO1jIgI_HAI94ubfmVWb2S) *today.  Share your story in advance if you would like to participate.*
    - *Help us advocate for your kids with special needs!  How is virtual learning affecting your special education student?  Share your story with MCCPTA.  bit.ly/PTAtestify*

* **Outdoor Space**—What role can outdoor spaces play in a safe return to school buildings?  And what role will it play in the future?  We believe that creating outdoor infrastructure that would extend the comfort of staff and students to spend more time outdoors.  These optional structures could be used for arrival/departure, mask-breaks, recess, outdoor lunch, and high exposure classes such as PE and music.  All outdoor spaces would have an indoor backup.  Here’s the [elevator pitch](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1GaZ9pCQSxj_85pz6X6IgtNYwokK2a6n5owS93CVHdU0/edit) document that has been shared with MCPS.  We have requested a meeting with Essie McGuire, MCPS Associate Superintendent for Operations,  to discuss this issue numerous times (beginning in late October) but MCPS has not been receptive to our meeting request.  We have some very experienced committee members who have identified some schools that would be open to adding outdoor infrastructure, but they need approval and support from MCPS to move forward.
* **Equity Hubs**—We have requested a meeting with Councilmember Will Jawando to discuss the role of Equity Hubs and how we can further support them in light of the continuation of virtual learning.  Councilmember Jawando, who helped champion Equity Hubs when they began, has previously expressed to Laura Stewart his interest in advancing Equity Hubs.
* **Mental Health**—We are extremely concerned about the mental health of our students after 10 months of distance learning, and we are concerned that our already stretched system for addressing student mental health and wellness will not be sufficient even as schools re-open because so many students have experienced prolonged trauma.  On Nov. 14, our Subcommittee wrote to Elizabeth Rathbone, MCPS Coordinator of Student Health and Wellness, to begin a dialogue about what MCPS is doing to address mental health and wellness among students, expressing concerns, and offering suggestions.  We met with members of the MCPS Student Health and Wellness Team on December 18 and again on January 21.  Elizabeth Rathbone is no longer with MCPS but we are slated to continue regular check-ins with MCPS on this issue.  Based on some feedback from these meetings, we are writing a letter to the Montgomery County Council to share our concerns about the mental health and wellness of MCPS students.
* **Technology**—Following our committee’s first meeting where technology was the main topic of concern, we wrote to Pete Cevenini, Chief Technology Officer for MCPS to express concerns about a) grading discrepancies between Canvas and Synergy, b) the inconsistency of teacher connectivity (and the effect this was having on students), c) what assistive technology is available for students with special needs.  As a follow up, Pete Cevenini attended the MCCPTA Delegates Assembly meeting on November 19.

Please reach out with any questions, suggestions, or feedback at VirtualLearning@mccpta.org.