**MCCPTA school climate and safety committee**

**2019-2020 Report**

**Gillian Huebner, Chair**

**RESOLUTION ON GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND SCHOOL SAFETY** – In December, MCCPTA and the [Montgomery County Regional Student Government Association](https://www.mcrsga.com/) (MCR-SGA) passed twin [resolutions on gun violence prevention and school safety](http://nebula.wsimg.com/7bbabeec0306f31197170fbe0da44487?AccessKeyId=AB71C8A62DC88BF7171E&disposition=0&alloworigin=1). 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. The resolutions have been given to the Board of Education and MCPS central office staff. No action has been taken yet. The BOE’s policy committee was meant to consider the resolutions in May, but this was cancelled due to school closures.

**THREATS AGAINST SCHOOLS** – More than 20 threats were 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](https://bethesdamagazine.com/bethesda-beat/police-fire/police-say-threat-against-blair-high-school-not-credible/) 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](https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/local/maryland/5-clarksburg-high-students-arrested-after-gun-brought-to-school/65-b7ff209f-24ad-4798-adf7-d7db1161f582) and [Wheaton, Edison, and Kennedy High School](https://bethesdamagazine.com/bethesda-beat/schools/threat-by-wheaton-high-staff-member-not-credible-police-say/) responded to "nonviable" threats. The Montgomery County Department of Police released a [statement](https://www.mymcpnews.com/2020/02/10/montgomery-county-department-of-police-statement-on-school-threats/) on threats against schools on February 10th. 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](https://www.safeschoolsmd.org/about-mcss/contact-mcss/Tipline_Media/). This is an important app to have on your phone. Make sure that you are signed up with [Alert MCPS](https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/emergency/alertmcps.aspx) to receive emergency notifications.

**COMMUNITY POLICING AND SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS (SRO)** – In October, the County Council introduced [Bill 33-19, Police - Community Policing](https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/ccllims/DownloadFilePage?FileName=2631_1_9748_Bill_33-19_Introduction_20191015.pdf&fbclid=IwAR2uJrrMWiyDPI27HR6FD4PJveYSDduXejx-FjvILQsb8Y_AYop8A1G_0aM), which aims to formalize community policing guidelines, including School Resource Officers. A public hearing took place on January 21st. See [this update](https://bethesdamagazine.com/bethesda-beat/government/activists-push-back-against-community-policing-bill/) about pushback from the community. The current memorandum of understanding between MCPS and MCPS is available [here](https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/departments/security-new/Executed%20SRO%20MOU.PDF). [This Washington Post article](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/md-politics/do-police-belong-in-schools-a-suburb-wrangles-with-how-to-keep-kids-safe/2020/02/21/f12abc72-4dee-11ea-b721-9f4cdc90bc1c_story.html) covers the ongoing debate. In the wake of George Floyd’s murder and the related protests, MCCPTA is currently working with student leaders, community partners and MCPS to plan a community listening/learning conversation on student safety in Montgomery County Public Schools, grounded in student voice and experience with input from those who work in our public schools.

**PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO INCIDENCES OF HATE, BIAS, AND DISCRIMINATION IN SCHOOLS** – MCPS received a grant from the [Maryland Center for School Safety](https://www.safeschoolsmd.org/) to address hate, bias, and discrimination in school communities. Maryland state reports on hate and bias incidents are accessible [here](https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/sharedaccountability/safetyglance/). Each report includes data as it relates to our county and schools. See [this blog](https://news.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/staff-bulletin/all-in-we-must-speak-out-against-hate-bias-and-discrimination/) by Superintendent Jack Smith. Deputy Superintendent Monifa McKnight speaks about these efforts in [this video](https://youtu.be/As0DW4nKI8A)(starting at minute 16:17).

**CHILD PROTECTION STAKEHOLDERS GROUP** – MCCPTA encouraged MCPS to establish a cross-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder group to address child protection concerns within the school system, including child abuse and neglect. MCCPTA has been active in this [working group](https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/childabuseandneglect/CAN%20Stakeholder%20Charge%20Statement.pdf) since it was established in January 2019. Originally focused on preventing and responding to child abuse and neglect, the focus is expanding to include other issues related to student welfare, including preventing discrimination, bias, and hate.

**TASKFORCE ON NEWLY ARRIVED AND UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS** – Since 2014, and especially this past summer, there has been an uptick in the numbers of newly arrived students from Central America in our schools. In 2017, MCCPTA passed a resolution recognizing the rights of and protections for newly arrived and undocumented students. MCCPTA is now engaged with the Children Fleeing Violence Workgroup, which works to ensure that the school system and community partners are responding with urgency and [best practices](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/beyond-teaching-english-supporting-high-school-completion-immigrant-and-refugee-students) in serving students with interrupted formal schooling, trauma, and other unique instructional and noninstructional needs. PTAs can play an important role in helping newly arrived students feel welcome and safe in our school communities. [Consider ways to help](http://blog.nassp.org/2019/08/21/12-ways-school-leaders-can-support-immigrant-families/?fbclid=IwAR1j4SPbdET1ycv6ryzphCUZvwQabOmY4duWweuS-0Guk8YIZIzwOYpjEfc) your schools with this important work.

**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](http://nebula.wsimg.com/08f1b3e36cca1dcfc61ca030264176bf?AccessKeyId=AB71C8A62DC88BF7171E&disposition=0&alloworigin=1) for the school. The MCPS [Office for Student and Family Support and Engagement](https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/studentservices/) may also be helpful in these situations. The MCPS Board of Education discussed student discipline on February 18th. Topics covered included [draft amendments](https://go.boarddocs.com/mabe/mcpsmd/Board.nsf/files/BLPS8471069F/$file/jga%2C%20draft%201%2C%20February%2018%2C%202020.pdf) to Policy JGA, suspension data by student population group, restorative justice, de-escalation training for staff, comprehensive coordinated early intervention services plan. A recording of the discussion is accessible [here](https://go.boarddocs.com/mabe/mcpsmd/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=BL4TB47678A0). The PowerPoint presentation, including data related to discipline, is accessible [here](https://go.boarddocs.com/mabe/mcpsmd/Board.nsf/files/BLZKG5502AA2/$file/Policy%20JGA%202020-02-18%20PMC%20presentation.pdf). A compilation of Maryland school discipline laws and regulations is [here](https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/discipline-compendium/Maryland%20School%20Discipline%20Laws%20and%20Regulations.pdf).

**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.

**ATHLETIC CULTURE** –An [external review of supervision of athletics and extracurricular activities](https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/publicinfo/external-review.aspx) was released in October. Current student-athlete safety training is [here](https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/departments/athletics/health/MCPS_Athlete_SafetyPPT.pdf). Additional resources are available [here](https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/athletics/). MCPS is working to finalize a partnership with the [National Center for Spectator Sports Safety & Security](https://ncs4.usm.edu/home) (NCS4). Athletic directors have received additional training from the [Student Welfare and Compliance Unit](https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/compliance/) regarding Tile IX, reporting, and bullying, hazing, and harassment and the MCPS Athletics Unit has been working with the Equity Initiatives Unit on equity issues in athletics. [This video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ZhZNxTDj1Q&feature=youtu.be) highlights some of these efforts.

The MCCPTA committee on school climate and safety chair met monthly with MCPS/OSFSE as well as meeting every six weeks with MCPS/Office of Student Welfare and Compliance, and quarterly with the Children Fleeing Violence Work Group. We also had ad hoc meetings with MCPS/Office of Security, the Restorative Justice Team, the Equity Initiatives Unit, and other partners.